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Peace Makers or Draft Dodgers:  
*Haredi* Resistance to Israeli Military Conscription

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Faculty of the University of Denver

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

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by  
Jay M. Politzer  
March 2010  
Advisor: Karen Feste

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Title: "Peace Makers or Draft Dodgers:  
    *Haredi* Resistance to Israeli Military Conscription"  
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## ABSTRACT

The *haredim* in Israel are an ultra-Orthodox Jewish religious group who uphold the most conservative of Jewish laws. Instead of serving in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) as all other Israelis do, the *haredim* are exempted from the IDF's policy of universal conscription. This thesis proposes three hypotheses to determine why Israel's *haredim* do not serve in the IDF. First, the *haredim* do not serve in the IDF because they do not want to; second, the *haredim* do not serve because they hold pacifistic political opinions; and third, the *haredim* do not serve because Jewish religious tradition forbids military service. To test these hypotheses, data were gathered by conducting a literature review and studying Israeli newspapers, official Israeli Government statistics, and unofficial public opinion surveys. Accordingly, a close examination of both the *haredi* worldview and the cultural characteristics of Israel's *haredi* communities suggests that the *haredim* do not want to serve in the IDF for self-interested reasons. Furthermore, a survey of *haredi* political opinions indicates that the majority of *haredim* exhibit a hawkish and aggressive political orientation. Finally, an analysis of individual *haredi* voices reveals that *haredi* yeshiva students consider their Torah studies to be an integral component to Israel's wartime activities. Contrary to the expectations of this thesis, *haredi* resistance to military service is not defined by an aversion to war or a commitment to peace, and it therefore cannot serve as a model for advocates of conflict resolution to emulate.

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## Chapter One

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# Introduction

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF), charged with maintaining the security of Israeli citizens, has a glorious and complex history of repelling enemy attacks from outside Israel's borders and neutralizing security threats from within. The method by which it fills its ranks is military conscription. While conscription is not a popular policy in many parts of the Western world, in Israel it has evolved into a powerful socializing instrument for shaping national identity. It is the product of historical consciousness, where the idea of survival is ingrained within every individual. Since its independence in 1948, Israel has engaged in numerous military conflicts. From the War of Independence (1947-1949), where the number of deaths exceeded 6,000, to the 1967 War (776 deaths), the War of Attrition (1968-1970: 1,424 deaths), the 1973 War (2,688 deaths), the First Lebanon War (1982-1985: 1,216 deaths), the Second Intifada (2000-2005: 328 deaths), the Second Lebanon War (2006: 117 deaths), and finally Operation Cast Lead (2008-2009: 10 deaths), the State of Israel has lost a large proportion of its population to war.<sup>1</sup> As the Jewish population of Israel is 5.59 million people, these battle casualties are a stark

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<sup>1</sup> Jewish Virtual Library, "Israeli Casualties in Battle," available from [http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/casualty\\_table.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/casualty_table.html); Internet; accessed 1 March 2009.

reminder of the extreme costs that Israel accrues during violent conflicts.<sup>2</sup> In spite of these risks, most 18-year-old Jewish Israelis willingly enlist in the IDF.

### *IDF Conscription*

The national conscription guidelines in Israel are as follows: all Jewish Israelis, male and female, are required to enlist in the IDF at the age of 18. After a period of regular duty (for men: 36 months, and for women: 21 months), all Jewish Israeli males serve up to 39 days per year in reserve duty until the age of 51.<sup>3</sup> In addition to Jewish Israeli conscripts, the IDF drafts male members of Israel's Druze and Circassian communities, whose numbers range in the hundreds. Male members of Israel's Bedouin communities, as well as a few select Israeli Arab Christians, may volunteer for IDF service. They are accepted on a case-by-case basis. These conscription guidelines allow the IDF to field a force of 176,500 regulars on active duty and 445,000 in reserve, totaling 621,500 available soldiers.<sup>4</sup>

In recent time, the number of draft-age Jewish Israeli males who do not serve in the military has been growing. In 1980, the level of non-service was 12.1 percent; in 1990, it was 16.6 percent; and in 2002, it was 23.9 percent. Of the 25 percent of draft-age Jewish Israeli males who did not serve in the IDF in 2007, 4 percent were residing abroad

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<sup>2</sup> Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Israel Celebrates 61 Years of Independence," 27 April 2009; available from [http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/2000\\_2009/2009/Israel\\_celebrates\\_61\\_years\\_independence\\_28-Apr-2009.htm](http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/2000_2009/2009/Israel_celebrates_61_years_independence_28-Apr-2009.htm); Internet; accessed 23 May 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Jewish Virtual Library, "Israel Defense Forces (IDF) – An Introduction," available from [http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Society\\_&\\_Culture/IDF.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Society_&_Culture/IDF.html); Internet; accessed 19 February 2009.

<sup>4</sup> The Institute for National Security Studies, "Middle East Military Balance," 11; available from [http://www.inss.org.il/upload/\(FILE\)1206270841.pdf](http://www.inss.org.il/upload/(FILE)1206270841.pdf); Internet; accessed 19 February 2009.

when receiving their call to duty; 3 per cent possessed a criminal record; 2 percent suffered from a physical incapacity or premature death; and 5 percent displayed a 'psychological incompatibility,' a softer term for 'draft-dodging.' The remaining 11 percent of draft-age Jewish Israeli males who did not serve are ultra-Orthodox *haredi* yeshiva students.<sup>5</sup>

### *Research Question*

The purpose of the following research is to unravel the specific motivations of this final group of Jewish Israelis for avoiding military service. In short, this research question asks why *haredi* yeshiva students choose not to serve in the IDF. In an attempt to answer this research question, this thesis will test three hypotheses: first, *haredi* yeshiva students simply do not want to serve in the IDF. Historical, social and communal motives justify the rejection of service in state institutions such as the military. While the *haredim* want to enjoy living in the state, they refuse to defend it. Second, ultra-Orthodox yeshiva students advocate peace. They oppose wars and reject all forms of violence. Rejecting service in the IDF is a political gesture to demonstrate pacifism. Third, Jewish religious law clearly forbids Jews to engage in violence conflict. Strictly observant yeshiva students cannot subject themselves to service in an institution that is violent by its very nature. Judaism and militarism are simply irreconcilable. Ultimately, are IDF deferments for ultra-Orthodox *haredi* yeshiva students the product of a moral and/or spiritual conviction to avoid violent conflict, or the product of a motivation that seeks to

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<sup>5</sup> Stuart A. Cohen, "The False 'Crisis' in Military Recruitment: An IDF Red Herring," The Begin/Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, Perspectives Paper No. 33, 23 July 2007; available from <http://www.biu.ac.il/Besa/perspectives33.html>; Internet; accessed 19 February 2009.



maximize their communal and social gain at the expense of sending other Israeli Jews to engage in violent conflict?

Viewed from a macro perspective, this research is both grounded in the field of conflict resolution and directly related to the larger Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For example, military conscription in Israel is, in and of itself, a conflict resolution mechanism. As will be explained later in this thesis, one of the founders' primary motivations for introducing military conscription at the outset of the State of Israel was to create a civic institution capable of transcending the ethnic and cultural cleavages that existed within the immigrating Jewish Diaspora. Israel's founders regarded the military as an instrument that would dilute the differences that existed among the newly arrived Jewish Israelis and give birth to an overarching sense of national identity. The same logic persists to this day; instead of exacerbating competing identities, military conscription in Israel serves to assuage conflicting needs and interests by instilling a sense of collective values and common ideals.

While military conscription serves to fashion a national Israeli identity, it also functions as Israel's principal means of managing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For better or worse, Israel's most frequent attempts at resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict involve the military. As such, it must field a massive military apparatus in order to address this conflict, and military conscription is a method that ensures that the military is never lacking for personnel. Through military conscription, Israel is always prepared to address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, regardless of how great a sacrifice of its citizenry is necessary.

In spite of the nationalizing effects of military conscription, the ultra-Orthodox *haredi* segments of Israeli society remain largely unaffected. For reasons examined in subsequent chapters of this thesis, Israel's *haredi* communities have traditionally resisted the trends of popular Jewish Israeli culture in favor of a cloistered lifestyle and vociferously denounced what they perceived as the secularizing tide of contemporary Israeli society. With this information in mind, Israel's founders publicly agreed to exempt a specified number of *haredi* yeshiva students from military conscription so that they could dedicate all of their energy to reviving the ultra-Orthodox *haredi* religious traditions that had almost been completely decimated by the Holocaust. Yet privately, the founders acquiesced to this arrangement in order to secure the silence of the *haredi* leaders who adamantly objected to the notion of Israeli statehood. Thus, the policy of *haredi* yeshiva student military exemptions began as a method of conflict prevention and mitigation. Had Israel's leaders refused to make this concession, they would have most certainly faced an extraordinarily high level of opposition to the establishment of the State of Israel from the *haredim*, placing them not only in conflict with neighboring Arabs and other anti-Zionists, but also with an important contingent of Palestinian Jewry. At every escalation of the numbers of exempted *haredim* since then, Israel's leaders consented in part because they sought to avoid an inflammation of intra-Jewish conflict.

The policy of *haredi* yeshiva student exemptions, however, has not been without consequences, as it affects the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in two problematic areas. First, the numbers of exempted *haredi* yeshiva students has skyrocketed to over 50,000 young men, a staggeringly high proportion to the overall number of conscripted Jewish Israelis. According to sources within the IDF, Israel's military apparatus will encounter a

dangerously low level of troops if this policy is allowed to continue at its current pace. Because Israel tends to utilize its military to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, its leaders could find themselves unable to defend the country and resolve the conflict if exorbitant numbers of Jewish Israelis are increasingly allowed to forego military service. Second, this policy unnecessarily adds tension to an already perilous conflict by pitting Jews against Jews, thereby inhibiting the emergence of a united Jewish effort focused on meaningfully addressing the larger Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A large portion of Jewish Israelis who willingly submit to military service take umbrage at the fact that a certain social group in Israel is lawfully permitted to avoid military service. To these detractors, a feeling exists that the Israeli government favors one segment of Jewish Israelis over the rest of the population and sends the majority of Jewish Israelis into the battle to fight on behalf of the *haredim*. As a result, a great animosity exists between the *haredim* and mainstream Jewish society, which indirectly affects the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by hampering the chances that these very different demographic groups will come together and agree to approach the conflict as an undivided Jewish front.

Due to the contentious nature of this policy, this research question will be analyzed through the lens of three hypotheses that are wholly based in the field of conflict resolution. The first hypothesis – that *haredi* yeshiva students do not serve in the military because they simply do not want to – purports that *haredi* non-service is the result of a personal aversion to conflict. In this scenario, *haredi* yeshiva students individually disagree with Israel's traditional method of conflict resolution – specifically, a military solution – and do not want to be party to its violent tactics. Thus, by steering clear of military service, they effectively avoid engaging in violent conflict. The second

hypothesis alleges that *haredi* yeshiva students avoid military service because they project a pacifistic political ideology. They politically oppose all forms of violent conflict, and their non-service is a political act intended to represent their opposition to violent methods of conflict resolution in favor of a peaceful and diplomatic approach. Violence, in this view, is at all times politically indefensible. The final hypothesis posits that *haredi* yeshiva students justify their non-service on religious grounds. As ultra-conservative adherents to the Jewish religious tradition, *haredi* yeshiva students are religiously prohibited from participating in war and directed to find peaceful solutions to potentially violent conflicts. From this argument, it follows that the Jewish people are not warmongers, but are instead, representatives of peace. While these three hypotheses are certainly not mutually exclusive, the examination of each one will offer an opportunity to decipher the true motivations of these yeshiva students and thus submit the soundest and most nuanced final judgment.

If there is truth to any of these hypotheses, they may represent a minor but important shift away from aggressive Jewish Israeli attitudes toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As was previously explained, each of these hypotheses assumes that *haredi* yeshiva students avoid military service for a specific reason related to conflict resolution. Should evidence surface that any of these justifications are legitimate, it would necessarily cast Israel's *haredi* communities in a favorable light. But what if these pacifistic feelings and opinions are not exclusive to the *haredim*, but are merely more apparent in these communities due to their military exemptions? What if *haredi* peaceful perspectives are an indicator of wider social trends permeating Jewish Israeli society as a whole? Do most young Jewish Israelis, for instance, wish to avoid engaging in the

violence that is indicative of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? Would they rather spend their time after high school in the pursuit of goals unrelated to the military? Do these same youngsters hold pacifistic political viewpoints, and therefore support a peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? And are there traditional Jewish principles that less religious Jewish Israelis can look to for guidance in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? To be sure, all of this is pure speculation, but the potential for changing attitudes should not be ignored. If any of these hypotheses are true of *haredi* motivations for not serving in the military, they may very well serve as a model for other Jewish Israelis to emulate. At that point, the world may begin to witness a renewed commitment to a peaceful resolution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

#### *History of Haredi Yeshiva Student Exemptions*

The military exemption of *haredi* yeshiva students has a long history. With the impending invasion of Arab armies in 1948, David Ben-Gurion, the first Prime Minister of the State of Israel, consolidated the various Jewish underground militias into the IDF and instituted a policy of national conscription to fill its ranks. As Jewish refugees from Eastern Europe began pouring into the fledgling state, leaders of the ultra-Orthodox communities pleaded with Ben-Gurion to exempt their most promising *Torah* scholars from military service. These leaders, most notably the *Hazon Ish* and Rabbi Elazar Schach, argued that the Holocaust had decimated the ultra-Orthodox communities, and these communities were in desperate need of scholars to resuscitate their traditions. Ben-Gurion acquiesced and permitted the exemption of 400 scholars who could avoid military

service and study in the yeshivas.<sup>6</sup> Ben-Gurion's reasoning for introducing this policy was not, however, limited to his sympathy with the plight of the *haredi* communities. True, Ben-Gurion recognized that the Holocaust had eradicated almost four-fifths of the *haredim* in Eastern Europe, and he sincerely wanted to provide an environment in Israel where they could restore their traditions.<sup>7</sup> But Ben-Gurion was also a shrewd pragmatist. He understood that the various segments of the *haredi* community shared an overwhelming antipathy toward Zionism and the establishment of an independent Jewish state through means other than the coming of the Messiah. In order to silence *haredi* opposition to the recommendations of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry, which was deliberating over the future of Palestine in 1946, Ben-Gurion negotiated a number of religious concessions with *haredi* leaders, one of which would eventually lead to the exemption of 400 yeshiva students from IDF conscription.<sup>8</sup>

The total number of yeshiva exemptions was held at approximately 400 until 1975, when then Minister of Defense Shimon Peres raised the quota to 800. When the Likud Party won its landmark electoral victory in 1977, its leaders convinced the *haredi* political party, Agudat Israel, to join the governing coalition.<sup>9</sup> Part of the coalition agreement included a stipulation to eliminate the ceiling of yeshiva student exemptions by broadening the criteria for exemption to include not only students for whom *Torato*

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<sup>6</sup> Nurit Stadler, "Playing with Sacred/Corporeal Identities: Yeshiva Students' Fantasies of Military Participation," *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society* 13, no. 2 (Winter 2007): 158.

<sup>7</sup> Donna Rosenthal, *The Israelis: Ordinary People in an Extraordinary Land* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 176.

<sup>8</sup> Stuart A. Cohen, *Israel and Its Army: From Cohesion to Confusion* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 131.

<sup>9</sup> Menachem Hofnung, "Ethnicity, Religion and Politics in Applying Israel's Conscription Law," *Law and Policy* 17, no. 3 (July 1995): 324-325.

*Omanuto* (“Torah is his profession”) applies but also ‘born-again’ – or newly religious – Jews as well as teachers and graduates of the *haredi* independent school system.<sup>10</sup> As a result, *haredi* deferrals immediately increased to 8,257 in 1977.<sup>11</sup> In the following decades, the number of *haredi* deferrals exploded. In 1987, 17,017 draft-age yeshiva students were deferred; 28,772 were deferred in 1997; and 41,450 yeshiva students were deferred in 2005.<sup>12</sup> In 2008, the number of deferred *haredi* yeshiva students skyrocketed to 55,300.<sup>13</sup> In terms of proportion to the overall pool of draft-age Jewish Israeli recruits, deferred *haredi* yeshiva students accounted for 3.7 percent in 1980; 4.6 percent in 1990; 9 percent in 2000; and 11.2 percent in 2007.<sup>14</sup> According to IDF officials, the rate of *haredi* yeshiva student deferments will increase to 25 percent of all 18-year-old Jewish Israeli males by the year 2020 if the policy continues at its current pace.<sup>15</sup>

The policy of *haredi* yeshiva student deferrals is based on Section 36(3) of the Defense Service Law (1986). This law grants the Minister of Defense the authority to grant deferrals to individuals, “...for reasons related to the size of the regular forces or reserve forces of the Israel Defense Forces or for reasons related to the requirements of

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<sup>10</sup> Steven V. Mazie, *Israel's Higher Law: Religion and Democracy in the Jewish State* (New York: Lexington Books, 2006), 189.

<sup>11</sup> Cohen, *Israel and Its Army*, 131.

<sup>12</sup> Mazie, *Israel's Higher Law*, 189.

<sup>13</sup> Ilan Shahr, “More and More Yeshiva Students Choosing Torah over IDF Service,” *Ha'aretz*, 31 July 2008; available from <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1007085.html>; Internet; accessed 19 February 2009.

<sup>14</sup> Cohen, “The False ‘Crisis’” and Hanan Greenberg, “Barak Refuses to Exempt 1,000 Haredim from IDF Service,” *YnetNews.com*, 6 March 2008; available from <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3515582,00.html>; Internet; accessed 4 May 2009.

<sup>15</sup> Ilan Shahr, “Only 80 Yeshiva Students Opted for National Service in the Past Year,” *Ha'aretz*, 5 June 2008; available from <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/990516.html>; Internet; accessed 25 February 2009.

education, security, settlement or the national economy or for family or other reasons.”<sup>16</sup>

The yeshiva student receives his military service deferral in the following way: when he reaches the age of conscription, he must obtain a recommendation for deferral from the head of his yeshiva and then submit an annual application for deferment to the Minister of Defense, who then approves the request on a case-by-case basis.<sup>17</sup> If the applicant is enrolled in full-time yeshiva study, his application is normally approved. After the *haredi* yeshiva student has been successfully deferred for a number of years, he eventually reaches an age for which the conscription guidelines no longer apply. At this point, he achieves a permanent exemption from military service.<sup>18</sup>

For almost four decades, the policy of yeshiva student deferment has been challenged in Israel’s Supreme Court. Beginning with *Becker v. Minister of Defense* (1970), most cases were dismissed on the basis that the petitioners had no standing to come before the court.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, the Court’s refusal to rule on this matter changed on December 9, 1998, when the Court issued its judgment concerning *Rubinstein v. Minister of Defense*. Writing on behalf of the unanimous opinion of the Court, President of the Supreme Court, Aharon Barak, ruled:

Although the Court has upheld the administrative arrangement in the past, relying on a statutory provision authorizing the Defense Minister to grant exemptions “for other reasons,” the growing number of students covered by the exemption has pushed it beyond his authority...At a certain point,

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<sup>16</sup> Mazie, *Israel’s Higher Law*, 189.

<sup>17</sup> Israel Shahak and Norton Mezvinsky, *Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel: New Edition* (London: Pluto Press, 2004), 29.

<sup>18</sup> Hofnung, “Ethnicity, Religion and Politics,” 324.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 325.



quantity becomes quality. The Defense Minister's current practice of granting deferrals and exemptions is invalid.<sup>20</sup>

With this ruling, the Court declared this practice, which had existed since the earliest days of the Jewish state, illegal. It did not, however, provide any recommendations to remedy the situation. Instead, it directed the Knesset to convene and propose new legislation. Barak concluded:

The Defense Minister or the Knesset should be allowed to conduct a serious and organized discussion regarding the entire issue and all of its ramifications... We must postpone the impact [*sic*] of our decision. With respect to our authority to do so... we have reached the conclusion that the appropriate period of postponement is twelve months from the day this judgment is rendered, i.e. until December 9, 1999.<sup>21</sup>

Nearly nine months later, on August 23, 1999, then Prime Minister Ehud Barak tapped retired Justice Zvi Tal to preside over a ten-person commission, assembled to draft new legislation concerning yeshiva deferrals and present it to the Knesset.<sup>22</sup>

### *The Tal Law*

As the Tal Commission deliberated, the IDF began to take steps of its own to integrate young *haredi* males into the military. In consultation with *haredi* rabbis, Major General Yehuda Segev, then Commanding Officer of the IDF's Manpower Branch, launched Battalion 97, or the *Netzach Yehuda* Battalion, in 1999.<sup>23</sup> Commonly known as *Nahal Haredi*, this battalion is a segregated unit that allows young *haredi* men to

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<sup>20</sup> *Rubinstein v. Minister of Defense*, H.C. 3267/97, 715/98 (1998), 2.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>22</sup> Mazie, *Israel's Higher Law*, 190.

<sup>23</sup> Cohen, *Israel and Its Army*, 133.

participate in military activities while remaining true to their religious requirements.

*Nahal's* website advertises the battalion's mission statement, stating that the regiment offers,

To provide for the unique spiritual needs of Haredi [*sic*] youth, while also enabling them to participate in the defense of Israel...To provide these young men with the educational and professional qualifications needed to achieve economic independence...To provide the Haredi [*sic*] community with a unique opportunity to share the nation's military burden as well as bridging the social gap between the secular and religious populations in Israel.<sup>24</sup>

In accordance with ultra-Orthodox religious practice, *Nahal* soldiers are protected from contact with female soldiers, afforded daily opportunities for prayer and Torah study, and allowed contact with their community rabbis.<sup>25</sup> During their period of enlistment, some *Nahal* soldiers serve in combat units, while others perform religious functions for the IDF such as ensuring kosher standards and administering death rituals.<sup>26</sup> Despite its establishment, *Nahal Haredi* did not become a viable option for *haredi* youths until the Tal Commission presented its proposal, and even then, it was met with limited success.

In March 2000, the Tal Commission delivered its conclusions. Its report began by recommending that yeshiva student deferrals continue without a ceiling. These deferrals did, however, include a stipulation. Although 18-year-old yeshiva students would remain deferred, the Tal Commission recommended that these students take an optional 'decision year' upon reaching the age of 22. During this year, yeshiva students would be free to

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<sup>24</sup> Nahal Haredi, "Mission Statement;" available from [http://www.nahalharedi.org/nahal\\_haredi\\_mission\\_statement.php](http://www.nahalharedi.org/nahal_haredi_mission_statement.php); Internet; accessed 4 April 2009.

<sup>25</sup> Cohen, *Israel and Its Army*, 132-133 and Nurit Stadler, Edna Lomsky-Feder and Eyal Ben-Ari, "Fundamentalism's Encounters with Citizenship: the Haredim in Israel," *Citizenship Studies* 12, no. 3 (June 2008): 222.

<sup>26</sup> Stadler, "Fundamentalism's Encounters," 221-222.

enter the labor market or enroll in educational or vocational training without fear of being conscripted. After the decision year, yeshiva students could choose from one of three options. First, these *haredim* could return to their yeshivas and remain deferred. Second, they could enlist in the IDF for a reduced term of service for four months, after which they would serve in the reserves, thus making them eligible to legally pursue employment. Third, they could volunteer for one year of civil service, such as in paramedic and firefighting units or in local departments of social services, which would also permit them to work and free them from the prospects of being drafted.<sup>27</sup> Two years later, in July 2002, the Knesset passed the Tal Commission's proposal by a vote of 51 in favor, 41 opposed, 5 abstentions and 22 absent, allowing the new law a five-year trial period.<sup>28</sup>

Following the ratification of the Tal Law, a large bloc consisting of the Movement for Quality Government, the Meretz and Shinui political parties, and private attorney Yehuda Ressler, presented petitions to the Supreme Court, alleging that the law violated Israel's Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty. This bloc argued that the Tal Law contravened the Basic Law's principle of equality by forcing the majority of Jewish Israelis to bear the burden of military service while allowing the *haredi* communities to avoid service altogether. Four years later, the Court rejected these petitions. Supreme Court President Barak stated:

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<sup>27</sup> Dan Izenberg, "Halutz Opposes Court Ruling on Tal Law," *Jerusalem Post*, 11 May 2006; available from <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=JPost/JPArticle/ShowFull&cid=1145961322633>; Internet; accessed 5 May 2009 and Matthew Wagner, "Tal Law Implementation Days Away," *Jerusalem Post*, 2 July 2007; available from <http://www.jpost.com/servlet.Satellite?cid=1183053087104&pagename=JPost/JPArticle/ShowFull>; Internet; accessed 5 May 2009.

<sup>28</sup> Cohen, *Israel and Its Army*, 132.

Alongside our decision that the petitions are rejected, because at this point in time we cannot determine that the law is unconstitutional, there is reason for concern that the Military Deferment Law [as it is formally named] will become unconstitutional. Indeed, our ruling today is that the Military Deferment Law is not yet unconstitutional, but there is cause for concern that it will become so unless there is a significant improvement in the results it has achieved [so far] in practice.<sup>29</sup>

Even though the Court ruled that the Tal Law was not unconstitutional, it nevertheless admitted that the law did, in fact, violate the Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty. They deemed that this discrepancy was tolerable because the Tal Law was "...for a worthy purpose and in keeping with the values of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state."<sup>30</sup> Moreover, the Court admonished both the IDF and the government for failing to provide adequate and attractive options to *haredi* yeshiva students who wanted to take the decision year. The Court concluded its opinion by threatening to terminate the law by the end of its trial period if it did not produce evidence of demonstrable progress.<sup>31</sup>

By mid-July 2007, the Tal Law had yielded mixed results. Many *haredi* yeshiva students had chosen to take the decision year. Yet, their numbers were a small fraction of the overall draft-age pool of *haredi* males. As of December 9, 2005, the state reported that 1,432 yeshiva students took the decision year, and only 618 of those students participated for the entire year. A mere 74 yeshiva students chose to join the army and 103 chose civil service.<sup>32</sup> In 2007, the number of *haredim* who joined the IDF was only

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<sup>29</sup> Izenberg, "Halutz Opposes Court Ruling."

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

353.<sup>33</sup> Despite these numbers, *Nahal Haredi* currently reports that the battalion consists of almost 1,000 soldiers.<sup>34</sup> According to other sources, this number is misleading, because more than half of this number is composed of national-religious soldiers who joined *Nahal* because they were "...attracted by its more stringently orthodox ambience."<sup>35</sup> Despite these diminutive numbers, the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee recommended that the Tal Law be extended by five more years. On July 18, 2007, the Knesset approved this extension by a vote of 56 in favor, 9 opposed and 2 abstentions.<sup>36</sup>

In closing, a word from David Ben-Gurion is appropriate. Ten years after he granted the first 400 military exemptions to *haredi* yeshiva students, he had second thoughts. In 1958, he wrote:

After the founding of the state, the sages came to me and told me: all centers of learning in the Diaspora were destroyed and this is the only country where some yeshivot were left. There are only a handful of students, so they should be exempted from military service. I considered their request...and gave orders to exempt yeshiva students. Things have changed since then: there are many religious students here and abroad...The mother who lost her son may say: maybe if there had been more soldiers with my boy, he would not have died...I suggest that you reconsider this matter. We do not wish to see the destruction of the Third Temple.<sup>37</sup>

Concomitantly,

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<sup>33</sup> Nehemia Shtrasler, "IDF Proposes Replacement to Tal Law; PM Expresses Support," *Ha'aretz*, 13 May 2007; available from <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/858896.html>; Internet; accessed 5 May 2009.

<sup>34</sup> Nahal Haredi, "Background about Nahal Haredi;" available from [http://www.nahalharedi.org/background\\_about\\_nahal\\_haredi.php](http://www.nahalharedi.org/background_about_nahal_haredi.php); Internet; accessed 4 April 2009.

<sup>35</sup> Cohen, *Israel and Its Army*, 133.

<sup>36</sup> Amnon Meranda, "Knesset Extends Tal Law by 5 Years," *YnetNews.com*, 18 July 2007; available from <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3427136,00.html>; Internet; accessed 5 May 2009.

<sup>37</sup> Hofnung, "Ethnicity, Religion and Politics," 324.

Studies have indicated that, in Jewish communities in the past (especially among East European Jewish communities), only a handful of prodigies, members of a select elite, dedicated their lives to the pursuit of knowledge.<sup>38</sup>

Why, then, are *haredi* yeshiva students avoiding military service in contemporary Israel in record numbers?

### *Methodology*

This thesis employs a historical/policy evaluative methodology to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the hypotheses. This particular methodology was chosen for two primary reasons: first, it is necessary to assess the extent to which the policy of *haredi* yeshiva student military exemptions has or has not deviated from the beliefs and goals of the leading actors who instituted it more the fifty years ago. If it has strayed from their original intentions, this methodology will help determine what factors forced this policy away from following its projected track. In so doing, this methodology will clarify how the three variables laid out in the hypotheses – personal motives, political views and religious observance – have shaped the trajectory of this policy, for better or for worse. Second, this methodology will provide the opportunity to pinpoint what, if any, political, social and cultural ramifications this policy has introduced to the Israeli body politic. If the effects of this policy are minimal, this methodology will help explain how the policy has been smoothly and amenably integrated into contemporary Israeli society. If, however, this policy has engendered controversy and resistance, this methodology will

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<sup>38</sup> Stadler, “Playing with Sacred/Corporeal Identities,” 160.

present a chance to consider the ways in which this policy contributes to intra-Jewish conflict in the State of Israel.

The data collected for this thesis are both extensive and diverse, comprising a literature review, online newspaper articles, official State of Israel statistics and unofficial public opinion surveys. The literature review touches on such issues as civil-military relations, the nature and structure of the IDF, Jewish religious tradition, Israel's ultra-Orthodox *haredi* communities, and conscientious objection in Israel. Although several authors are reviewed, three specific authors deserve special attention for their contribution to this thesis. Nurit Stadler, senior lecturer at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, provides a rare and much-needed perspective of *haredi* views of military service. Her specialization in the fields of religious fundamentalism and ultra-Orthodoxy in Israel shines in the such essays as, "Fundamentalism's Encounters with Citizenship: the Haredim in Israel," "Other-Worldly Soldiers? Ultra-Orthodox Views of Military Service in Israel," and "Playing with Sacred/Corporeal Identities: Yeshiva Students' Fantasies of Military Participation." Moreover, Stuart A. Cohen, Professor of Political Science at Bar-Ilan University and Chair of the academic council of the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, offers a valuable and unbiased appraisal of the relationship between the IDF and Israeli society as well as IDF manpower policies in his publications entitled, "The False 'Crisis' in Military Recruitment: An IDF Red Herring," "Tensions Between Military Service and Jewish Orthodoxy in Israel: Implications Imagined and Real," and *Israel and Its Army: From Cohesion to Confusion*. Finally, Menachem Friedman, Emeritus Professor of Sociology at Bar-Ilan University, utilizes his expertise in the fields of secularization and

confrontation between religious and non-religious Jewish groups and the processes of extremism and zealotry to present a pointed and unique portrait of *haredi* views of conflict and violence. His essays, “Haredi Violence in Contemporary Society” and “*Haredim* and Palestinians in Jerusalem,” are unmatched in their originality and attention to detail. Without the insights of these authors, this thesis would have had tremendous difficulty getting off of the ground.

In addition to the literature review, online Israeli newspaper articles provided up-to-date opinions and statistics. Three well-read and respected online Israeli newspapers, *Ynetnews*, *The Jerusalem Post* and *Ha'aretz*, provided the bulk of these articles. *Ynetnews* is the online English version of Israel's most popular newspaper, *Yedioth Ahronoth*, and it is a largely independent/moderate newspaper that provides both left- and right-wing views. The reports from one of its journalists, Hanan Greenberg, offer the opinions of non-*haredi* Israelis regarding the policy of *haredi* military deferrals. In addition, *The Jerusalem Post*, a historically conservative newspaper, presents its readers with new developments in this policy debate, including strong coverage of recent government decisions concerning the Tal Law. Lastly, *Ha'aretz*, recognized as Israel's liberal media outlet, submits current statistics on *haredi* yeshiva student military deferrals and conveys an anti-Tal Law sentiment through one of its reporters, Ilan Shahar. Taken together, the reportage of these newspapers complements the literature review by adding a ‘breaking news’ dimension to this policy debate.

Many of the statistics central to this thesis were gathered from official State of Israel websites. The websites for the Knesset, the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Central Bureau of Statistics provided much-needed demographic and political data.



Other statistics, such as information regarding the military capabilities and manpower make-up of the IDF, were provided by the websites of *Nahal Haredi* and the Institute for National Security Studies. Supplementary statistics were provided by Stuart A. Cohen's study, "The False 'Crisis' in Military Recruitment: An IDF Red Herring," which was sponsored by the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies. In this invaluable essay, Cohen supplies the current rates of non-service of non-*haredi* young Israeli males as well as the proportion of *haredi* non-enlistment to the overall draft-age Jewish Israeli male population over the past three decades.

Beyond statistics, public opinion surveys constitute a considerable portion of this research. These surveys were used to determine the political attitudes of the *haredi* communities in Israel *vis-à-vis* the conflict with the Palestinians and to highlight the political differences between the *haredim* and other non-ultra-Orthodox Jewish groups in Israel. The most comprehensive surveys come from the Institute for National Security Studies, which produces an annual compendium of Israeli public opinion on national security. The surveys from 2001, 2003 and 2005-2007 offer detailed summaries of Israeli public opinion based on a sliding scale of religious observance, from those who observe all Jewish religious traditions (ultra-Orthodox) to those who practice no Jewish religious traditions (secular). The findings from all surveys utilized in this thesis will provide an occasion to analyze the extent to which Israel's *haredi* communities advocate either an escalation or a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. More significantly, these findings will make it possible to judge how these political opinions correlate with the general *haredi* practice of avoiding military service and what this may mean for Jewish Israeli social harmony.

## Chapter Two

# The Significance of IDF Service

A thorough examination of the phenomenon of mass IDF deferrals for ultra-Orthodox yeshiva students would be incomplete without a brief discussion of the role that the IDF plays in modern Israeli society. This chapter explores the nature of civil-military relations in Israel and focuses primarily on the significance of obligatory military service for Israel's Jewish population, especially as it relates to the development of a collective national identity. It then analyzes the potential negative consequences of non-service in terms of social mobility and economic development. Moreover, it attempts to gauge the reaction of non-*haredi* Jewish Israelis to this policy of mass IDF deferrals for ultra-Orthodox yeshiva students. Finally, this chapter concludes by providing an in-depth analysis of the level of conflict engendered among the disparate Jewish elements of Israeli society as a by-product of this policy of *haredi* non-enlistment.

### *Dawn of National Conscription*

When the Jewish leaders of the Yishuv declared independence for the State of Israel in 1948, they did so, in part, to attract the global Jewish Diaspora to immigrate to the nascent Jewish state. As was the case then and now, the various communities of the Jewish Diaspora constituted a veritable 'melting-pot' of identities, cultures and values. Upon arrival to the Jewish state, these immigrant communities did not shed their

distinguishing characteristics, but they instead entrenched themselves among similar immigrants and created sub-communities within the fledgling Israeli polity.

Consequently, the various communities of the early Jewish state shared few common traits with each other, except, of course, for their Jewish ethnicity and/or religious practices.

While the Jewish communities of the early Jewish state possessed few commonalities, they nevertheless found themselves drawn together in defense of the nation during their war for independence in 1948. Because the attacking Arab armies vastly outnumbered the Jewish population in 1948, it was incumbent upon the majority of the newly minted Israeli Jews to join ranks and contribute to the defense effort.

This first major violent conflict for the State of Israel provided Israeli leaders with the opportunity to integrate Israel's various Jewish communities into an inclusive collective. When Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion established the policy of universal conscription for the IDF, his reasoning surpassed the basic need to gather fighters to defend the young nation during its war for independence. From the outset, Ben-Gurion believed that few other national institutions could more successfully integrate the disparate Jewish communities into Israeli society than the military. He wrote:

Our soldier is first and foremost a citizen, in the fullest meaning of that term. A citizen belonging to his [or her] homeland, to the history of the nation, its culture and language...[The military] is the state institution where all cleavages: ethnic, political, class-based or of any other sort, vanish. Each soldier is equal to his companion in status.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ayelet Shachar, "Citizenship and Membership in the Israeli Polity," in *From Migrants to Citizens: Membership in a Changing World*, ed. T. Alexander Aleinikoff and Douglas Klusmeyer (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2000), 416.

More than sixty years later, Ben-Gurion's statement still carries weight. As will be shown later in this chapter, military service in Israel has not only served to integrate the various Jewish communities in Israel, but it has also come to be defined as the Jewish Israeli's most sacred civic duty, conferring upon those who serve with a range of rights and privileges.

### *Civil-Military Relations in Israel*

Before moving to the discussion about the significance of military service in Israel, it is important to note that Ben-Gurion's reasoning about the integrative nature of military service was by no means novel. To be sure, Ben-Gurion drew on the historical lesson that wars and military service have a binding effect on societies, idealized in both William James' notion that, "[wars are] the gory nurse that trained societies to cohesiveness," and Hegel's assertion that military service is the, "ultimate expression of the individual's recognition of his membership [in] the ethical community of the state."<sup>40</sup>

In his book, *Fighting for Rights: Military Service and the Politics of Citizenship*, Ronald R. Krebs explores the notion that a nation's military generates powerful expressions of the citizens' collective allegiance to, and ownership of, the state. He contends that, through military service, citizens of the state gather together and discover through their aggregate efforts that they are equal and integral parts of an undertaking much greater than their distinct communities.

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<sup>40</sup> Ronald R. Krebs, *Fighting for Rights: Military Service and the Politics of Citizenship* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 17.

The armed forces...bring together individuals of various backgrounds in common cause and in a collaborative spirit, providing a setting seemingly well-suited to breaking down dividing lines based on race, ethnicity, religion, or class...[and] they...emerge cognizant that they [are] constitutive pieces of a larger project.<sup>41</sup>

While serving in the military, individuals come into contact with myriad ethnicities and cultures, but instead of exacerbating these differences, the military fosters a new set of values to which every individual soldier can ascribe. Shared military service during times of war and peace allows individuals to transcend identity cleavages and realize a new sense of belonging – membership in a greater collective that is the nation.

From the time of Israel's war for independence, Israel's existence has been defined by conflict, from large-scale wars to low-intensity struggles. In fact,

Israel has been involved in more wars since World War II than any other country in the world. Some Israelis perceive the brief history of their state as one long war punctuated by occasional cease-fires and lulls in acts of terrorism.<sup>42</sup>

In a country roughly the size of New Jersey, few Israeli Jews have been able to find respite from the effects of frequent violent conflict. Unfortunately for Israeli Jews, many have come to perceive their country in terms of this well-known mantra: "all citizens are soldiers and the entire state is the front line."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Krebs, *Fighting for Rights*, 7.

<sup>42</sup> Myron J. Aronoff, "Wars as Catalysts of Political and Cultural Change," in *The Military and Militarism in Israeli Society*, ed. Edna Lomsky-Feder and Eyal Ben-Ari (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999), 37.

<sup>43</sup> Asher Arian, "Vox Populi: Public Opinion and National Security," in *National Security and Democracy*, ed. Avner Yaniv (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993), 138-139.

### *Social and Economic Aspects of Military Service*

As mentioned previously, military service in Israel is considered the most sacred civic obligation. There is no greater duty than sacrificing one's life in defense of the state. Consequently, IDF service confers enormous advantages to those individuals who present themselves to the state. In many ways, IDF service defines an individual's status within Israeli society. Asher Arian notes that this status-building can start as early as adolescence, as teenagers begin to dream about the military unit in which they wish to serve.<sup>44</sup> Gabriel Ben-Dor and Ami Pedahzur further this argument by writing that the most valuable opportunities for employment and higher education come only to those Israelis who have dedicated a significant portion of their adult lives to IDF service.<sup>45</sup> Myron J. Aronoff even goes as far as claiming that families and communities whose members suffer a high proportion of casualties during military service are elevated to a higher status within society.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, it would not be hyperbole to claim that IDF service is the most indispensable tool for achieving upward mobility within Israeli society.

Since the IDF has an official policy of universal conscription, it would seem that every Israeli has the same opportunity to achieve success and stature in Israeli society. However, as has been explained, there are many social and ethnic groups in Israel that do not share in the burden of military service. While these groups certainly enjoy the benefit of not having to risk losing their lives during war, their non-service has worked to place

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<sup>44</sup> Arian, "*Vox Populi*," 129.

<sup>45</sup> Gabriel Ben-Dor and Ami Pedahzur, "Civil-Military Relations in Israel at the Outset of the Twenty-First Century," in *Jews in Israel: Contemporary Social and Cultural Patterns*, ed. Uzi Rebhun and Chaim I. Waxman (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2004), 334.

<sup>46</sup> Aronoff, "Wars as Catalysts," 42.

them at the margins of society, allowing those Israelis who do serve to question their dedication to, or merit for, membership in the state.<sup>47</sup> Ayelet Shachar writes,

In a country like Israel, where identity and group membership matter significantly and where wars and armed confrontations are still, for various exogenous and endogenous reasons, a real threat, military service has become an obvious demarcating tool for distinguishing between members of the same polity – that is, between those who truly belong to the republic and those who are entitled to the rights of citizenship in the state but are conceived as less than full members of the political community because they do not partake in its most fundamental expressions of self-determination, that is, military service.<sup>48</sup>

By not fulfilling this most sacred civic duty of military service, the groups who do not serve are generally relegated to the Israeli social periphery. In this position, they find themselves at a distinct disadvantage in terms of equality of opportunity.

The most profound consequence of non-service is economic. By and large, Jewish Israelis who do not serve in the IDF are denied employment opportunities in both the public and private sectors.<sup>49</sup> For the *haredi* yeshiva students who receive deferments from the IDF, options to generate income are limited. According to Matthew Wagner, a journalist for the *Jerusalem Post*, Jewish men are forbidden by law from seeking employment until they have served in the army, have reached the age of forty-one, or have fathered five children by the age of thirty-one.<sup>50</sup> While Wagner also reports that many *haredi* yeshiva students work within the black market *haredi* community, this

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<sup>47</sup> Krebs, *Fighting for Rights*, 17.

<sup>48</sup> Shachar, “Citizenship and Membership,” 417.

<sup>49</sup> Ben-Dor, “Civil-Military Relations in Israel,” 337.

<sup>50</sup> Wagner, “Tal Law Implementation Days Away.”

income is barely enough to provide for one individual, let alone the large families that are characteristic of the *haredi* community.<sup>51</sup>

A few statistics will illustrate the dismal economic situation of Israel's *haredi* community. *Haredi* households have an average of 7.7 children, and sixty percent of the heads of these households (the *haredi* male population, aged 25-54) does not work at all due to full-time yeshiva studies.<sup>52</sup> In order to cope with this economic situation, the state pays for at least seventy percent of *haredi* families' total income.<sup>53</sup> Government stipends for yeshiva students account for half of this income (a meager \$200 per month in 1997), and the remainder comes from state-subsidized child allowances.<sup>54</sup> Even with these welfare benefits, the *haredi* economic situation is dire: over half of the *haredi* population falls below the poverty line.<sup>55</sup> While their lowly economic status is not wholly a by-product of non-service – for some *haredim* refuse to work in any environment associated with Zionism – it is difficult to dispute the argument that their refusal to participate in the IDF is directly correlated to *haredi* economic distress.

#### *Grievances against Haredi Yeshiva Student Exemptions*

The effects of the marginalization of those who do not serve in the IDF are not simply economic. To be sure, the policy of *haredi* yeshiva student deferrals has generated

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<sup>51</sup> Wagner, "Tal Law Implementation Days Away."

<sup>52</sup> Stadler, "Fundamentalism's Encounters," 220.

<sup>53</sup> Mazie, *Israel's Higher Law*, 205.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.



a major social conflict between the *haredi* communities and the rest of Jewish Israeli society, or as Steven V. Mazie has described, “a worsening *Kulturkampf*.”<sup>56</sup> Part of this conflict arises out of the fact that military service places an immeasurable burden on IDF recruits. Drafted at the age of eighteen for an initial period of three years, soldiers are essentially deprived of three of the most formative years of their lives. While most eighteen-year-olds are leaving home for college or entering the job market for the first time, these Jewish Israelis embark on a path that will expose them to violence and death. Furthermore, after their initial service, IDF recruits devote several weeks per year to reserve duty until their mid-fifties. As such, “[reserve] soldiers experience enormous difficulties in their family lives, academic training, and especially their careers.”<sup>57</sup>

Due to this immense burden, IDF recruits and reservists have voiced two primary grievances against the policy of deferred military service for *haredi* yeshiva students. Their first objection is related to the economic situation of the *haredim*. Many IDF soldiers cannot fathom why *haredi* communities receive such an enormous amount of financial support from the state when they do not participate in the state’s most fundamental civic duty. According to Nurit Stadler and Eyal Ben-Ari, this grievance is rooted in the idea of citizenship and the equitable distribution of civic responsibilities. “The [*h*]aredi community is criticized for accumulating state resources without evincing a willingness to bear their share of collective duties. These stances have often been formulated in terms of the [*h*]aredim being ‘parasites’ of the state...”<sup>58</sup> The degree of

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<sup>56</sup> Mazie, *Israel’s Higher Law*, 203.

<sup>57</sup> Ben-Dor, “Civil-Military Relations in Israel,” 335.

IDF soldiers' frustration at this trend is observable in one of the interviews conducted by Donna Rosenthal for her book, *The Israelis: Ordinary People in an Extraordinary Land*. One of her interviewees, Tamir, a teenage soldier on active duty, expressed his irritation in powerful terms:

They're draft evaders. It's disgusting, unfair... We feel betrayed. Instead of 'One People, One Draft,' we carry their load, protecting them and supporting them and their enormous families... If they don't want to share the burden, they should leave the country.<sup>59</sup>

From the perspective of the soldier, his/her service is an indispensable component of protecting the existence of an Israeli society where the *haredim* are free to practice their lifestyle. That the *haredim* are predominantly exempt from service leads soldiers to question the legitimacy of the state's reasoning for continuing to provide physical and financial support for these communities. Thus, the IDF soldier might argue that only through military service may an Israeli be allowed to enjoy the full social and material benefits of the state.

The second grievance of IDF soldiers is related to the aforementioned maxim that defines the state as the front line of defense in times of war. Because violence permeates every facet of Israeli life, most Israelis believe that they serve not only to ensure the continued existence of the State of Israel but also to protect their families and loved ones from harm. In this respect, military service becomes a deeply personal issue. Jewish Israelis accept their military service because it directly contributes to the safety and wellbeing of the people to whom they are closest. Hence, Jewish Israeli soldiers take

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<sup>58</sup> Nurit Stadler and Eyal Ben-Ari, "Other-Worldly Soldiers? Ultra-Orthodox Views of Military Service in Contemporary Israel," *Israel Affairs* 9, no. 4 (2003): 19.

<sup>59</sup> Rosenthal, *The Israelis*, 51.

exception to the *haredi* communities' rejection of military service. To these soldiers, it may seem that the *haredim* exploit the willingness of the vast majority of Israeli Jews to serve by staying home, thereby avoiding the effects of violent conflict. From this perspective, the proverbial give-and-take of military service is deeply flawed; most Jewish Israelis sacrifice their lives to the state while most *haredim* unjustly enjoy the protective benefits of Israel's robust military apparatus.

The voices of resentment toward the *haredi* avoidance of military service emanate from a wide range of sectors in Jewish Israeli society, from both right- and left-wing political parties and secular and non-*haredi* religious segments. For instance, Yosef Lapid, former Knesset Member of the Shinui Party, railed against this policy, exclaiming, "And what is this exemption of...yeshiva students from military service, but the trade in the blood of secular youngsters...a cynical, corrupt, and offensive trade in the lives of our children."<sup>60</sup> Moreover, Captain Gil Bickel, a deputy battalion commander in the IDF reserves, protested this policy by handing in his military rank and officer's ID. He proclaimed, "I won't serve in the reserves any longer and if I am called up, I would rather be locked up...so many [*haredi*] citizens shirk their service, without any justification and without any consideration from the military in terms of distributing the load equally."<sup>61</sup>

Most interestingly, one particular *haredi* rabbi is known to have opposed this policy. Rabbi Shlomo Yosef "Rav" Zevin makes a compelling argument against *haredi* yeshiva student exemptions very much in line with his secular counterparts. He begins his

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<sup>60</sup> Stadler, "Other-Worldly Soldiers," 19.

<sup>61</sup> Hanan Greenberg, "We Won't Be the Nation's Suckers," *Ynetnews.com*, 13 July 2007; available from <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3424971,00.html>; Internet; accessed 5 May 2009.

statement by taking a jab at those *haredi* yeshiva students who do not serve. “Will you send your brothers to war, and yourselves sit at home...Is your blood redder than theirs?”<sup>62</sup> Zevin then poses a hypothetical question, asking *haredi* yeshiva students what they would do if every person was a yeshiva scholar and there was no IDF to provide for defense. “Would we allow our enemies to ravage our land and kill our people without taking up arms to defend ourselves?”<sup>63</sup> Zevin concludes his statement by summoning one of his halachic sources that commands *everyone* to contribute to defense during wartime. “All go out to fight, even the bridegroom from his chamber and the bride from her chuppah.”<sup>64</sup> In essence, Zevin’s remarks aim to push *haredi* yeshiva students to look inward and examine the value that they place on their families and communities. Is there more intrinsic value on Torah studies than on physical safety? Must Torah scholars acquiesce in the face of violence and subject themselves to the actions of attacking armies? Although these are difficult questions to penetrate, the following chapters will attempt to reveal a detailed response by analyzing the various motivations for non-service, from traditional religious commandments to moral precepts of non-violence.

### *Conscientious Objectors*

Related to the mass deferment of *haredi* yeshiva students from military service is the growing phenomenon among other less religious Jewish Israelis who either invoke their right to conscientious objection by refusing to obey military orders in certain

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<sup>62</sup> Rabbi Alfred S. Cohen, “On Yeshiva Men Serving in the Army,” *Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society*, no. 23 (Spring 1992, Pesach 5752): 4; available from [http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/english/halacha/cohen\\_1.htm](http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/english/halacha/cohen_1.htm); Internet; accessed 14 April 2009.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

situations or resist the IDF draft altogether. This particular trend began to gain steam during the al-Aqsa Intifada as growing numbers of Jewish Israelis objected to the manner in which their government responded to the mounting unrest in the Occupied Territories.<sup>65</sup> Emerging from this political indignation were four groups: *Yesh Gvul*, *Courage to Refuse*, *New Profile*, and *Shministim*. While these groups differ in their *modi operandi*, they are united by their opposition to Israel's policy in the Occupied Territories as well as by their conviction that individual Jewish Israelis possess the right to refuse military service. Moreover, their existence is made possible by the creeping changes taking place in the relationship between military service and civilian life in Israel. Whereas in the past, military service in Israel was directly related to the social standing of the individual, its effect on some demographic groups' ability to flourish in the business and political realm has since ebbed. Unlike the *haredim*, these protest groups belong to the middle and upper Ashkenazi classes of Israeli society. As such, their potential for upward mobility in Israeli society is less dependent on their military record than the poor and ethnic elements of Israeli society who rely on military service to enhance their status in the Israeli body politic.<sup>66</sup>

In addition to the waning relationship between military service and civilian life, repeated IDF debacles – i.e. the government's failure to foresee the outbreak of the 1973 Yom Kippur War and the IDF's disastrous invasions and subsequent occupation of Lebanon – have led segments of Israeli society to challenge openly the pervasiveness of the IDF in civil society. These segments object to the prioritization of military values in

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<sup>65</sup> Yulia Zemlinskaya, "Between Militarism and Pacifism: Conscientious Objection and Draft Resistance in Israel," *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies* 2, no. 1 (May 2008): 1.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

contemporary Israel and advocate a societal shift away from the current militaristic culture of the state. According to Yulia Zemlinskaya, their beliefs belong to a new philosophy known as Post-Zionism, which, "...criticiz(es) the discriminatory nature of the state defined in nationalistic terms...and provides a vision of a more civil and liberal Israel."<sup>67</sup> One of the most visible manifestations of the Post-Zionist critique is the public challenge to unconditional and uncontested service in the IDF.

As mentioned previously, these protest groups contest compulsory IDF service in different ways. For instance, members of *Yesh Gvul* ("There is a limit!") and *Courage to Refuse* advocate the right of an IDF soldier to refuse to participate in military service on a case-by-case basis. Comprised primarily of reservist soldiers, members of *Yesh Gvul* and *Courage to Refuse* are not wholly opposed to military service. On the contrary, they believe that IDF service is an important civic duty for Jewish Israelis. However, their enthusiasm for military sacrifice is equaled by their intense objection to IDF operations in Palestinian towns and neighborhoods. When ordered to serve in the Occupied Territories, the soldiers belonging to these two groups argue that they possess the right for "selective refusal."<sup>68</sup> According to their logic, if a soldier opposes – intellectually, politically, emotionally or spiritually – a specific military plan, that soldier should be allowed the freedom to refuse to be a party to the operation. They advocate a system in which the IDF, "...allow[s] each individual the leeway to decide where, when and under what circumstances he will fulfill his military duties."<sup>69</sup> To be sure, this line of reasoning

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<sup>67</sup> Zemlinskaya, "Between Militarism and Pacifism," 2.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 13.

neither rejects military service outright nor downplays the necessity of Israel's powerful military establishment. If anything, their selective refusal reflects a concern that IDF operations in the Occupied Territories actually threaten the security of Israel proper by inflaming anti-Israeli sentiments. So while the members of *Yesh Gvul* and *Courage to Refuse* object to certain IDF strategies, they still remain deeply committed to the defense of the Jewish nation.

Unlike *Yesh Gvul* and *Courage to Refuse*, members of *New Profile* and *Shministim* ("twelfth graders") reject IDF service outright. Composed of high-school age Jewish Israelis, these conscientious objectors oppose all forms of military service, from roles in combat and logistical support to educational and media functions. This younger generation of conscientious objectors is ardently pacifistic, wholly committed to preserving life at all costs. For these youths, human life is priceless, and its existence should not be threatened by any mandatory state requirements. Hence,

...the value of the nation-state is nullified by the value of human life... The state [is] a tool that is meant to serve its citizens. No state can demand its citizens to sacrifice their life in its name. The existence of people... 'is more important than existence of a country.' The Jewish state is not an exception.<sup>70</sup>

Members of *New Profile* and *Shministim* refuse to place their lives in danger for the sake of the State of Israel, arguing that the government does not have the moral authority to make such demands. In addition to this conviction, these students castigate the very nature of Israel's conscription policy, asserting that military service is a source of moral decay. With strikingly similar rhetoric as young *haredi* males who do not serve in the IDF, these largely secular youngsters view military service, "...as corrupting society's

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<sup>70</sup> Zemlinskaya, "Between Militarism and Pacifism," 21-22.

moral image, as harming its security and economy,” and they believe that, “...participating in the military means committing immoral acts.”<sup>71</sup> In sum, for the members of *New Profile* and *Shministim*, military service is utterly negative, no matter the utility it provides in protecting the existence of the Jewish state.

The actions of all four groups described above have not been without controversy. Like the policy of *haredi* yeshiva student exemptions, the Israeli courts have weighed in on the matter of draft resistance and conscientious objection. In one well-known case, *The Military Prosecutor v Private Haggai Matar et al.* (2003), five individuals who refused to report for duty in the Occupied Territories were put on trial, charged with disobeying a direct military order. After hearing both sides of the argument, the court ruled against the defendants, summarizing its opinion in a particularly sharp verdict:

This is [an] ideological or political crime, and it is more severe and dangerous than regular criminal activity stemming from a wish for personal benefit...not only do they disobey the law, they renounce its compulsory power. They might be imitated by others, enjoy the support of people and public institutions, which hinders an egalitarian enforcement of law, and might gather around them a large public, who might be prepared to exhibit violence [*sic*] behavior to the point of mutiny and rebellion against the authorized government, that is, democratic society.<sup>72</sup>

From this statement, it is clear how the government feels about conscientious objectors and draft-dodgers: they simply cannot be tolerated. Jewish Israeli youth must willfully report for military service and unquestioningly obey orders. Any resistance to this policy, as the court surmised in its opinion, threatens the very stability the Jewish nation.

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<sup>71</sup> Zemlinskaya, “Between Militarism and Pacifism,” 24 and Hadar Aviram, “How Law Thinks of Disobedience: Perceiving and Addressing Desertion and Conscientious Objection in Military Courts,” *Law and Policy* 30, no. 3 (June 2008): 7.

<sup>72</sup> *The Military Prosecutor v. Private Haggai Matar et al.*, Headquarters 151, 174, 205, 222, 243/03:3 (2003). Text used from Aviram, “How Law Thinks of Disobedience,” 2.



But why are the *haredim* seemingly shielded from punishment for not reporting for military duty unlike the rest of their young peers? Are the tens of thousands of *haredi* youths exempted from military service not an example that might be imitated? Do *haredi* military exemptions represent an egalitarian enforcement of the law? These are difficult questions to answer, and any conclusions are certain to be controversial. Nevertheless, it is imperative to take note of the court's aforementioned verdict when considering the societal strife engendered by the government's long-standing policy of wholesale military exemptions for *haredi* yeshiva students. Indeed, the government's apparent double-dealing is not without consequences.

#### *Public Opinion and Conscription Policy*

The data reveal that the majority of Israelis supports current IDF conscription procedures and opposes the right of a soldier to refuse orders to serve. According to Asher Arian, 89 percent of the Jewish population favored conscription service over a volunteer army in 2001.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, Yehuda Ben Meir and Dafna Shaked report that in the years 2003-2007, an average of over 75 percent of Jewish Israelis considered the refusal of an IDF soldier to serve in the Occupied Territories as illegitimate, with their disapproval for refusing orders peaking at 83 percent in 2004 and dropping to 68 percent in 2005.<sup>74</sup> Arian also reports that in 2003, a meager 27 percent of Jewish Israelis believed

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<sup>73</sup> Asher Arian, "Israeli Public Opinion on National Security 2001," Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Memorandum no. 60 (August 2001): 35; available from [http://www.inss.org.il/upload/\(FILE\)1190277683.pdf](http://www.inss.org.il/upload/(FILE)1190277683.pdf); Internet; accessed 10 June 2009.

<sup>74</sup> Yehuda Ben Meir and Dafna Shaked, "The People Speak: Israeli Public Opinion on National Security 2005-2007," The Institute for National Security Studies, Memorandum no. 90 (May 2007): 85; available from [http://www.inss.org.il/upload/\(FILE\)1188302092.pdf](http://www.inss.org.il/upload/(FILE)1188302092.pdf); Internet; accessed 10 June 2009.

that the responsibility of military service was spread out equally among the population, owing to a large extent to their disapproval of military exemptions bequeathed to certain social groups.<sup>75</sup>

A more detailed explanation of this disapproval is revealed in the data offered by Eliezer Ben-Rafael in his 2008 essay, “The Faces of Religiosity in Israel: Cleavages or Continuum.” He presents the findings of a survey question given to 971 Jewish Israeli respondents, in which they are invited to measure their attitude to the question, “Military service is crucial in Israel; should some groups be exempted – such as ultra-Orthodox youngsters, religious women, Arabs, or pacifists?”<sup>76</sup> The respondents are asked to describe their attitude toward military exemptions as “opposed,” “don’t really know,” or “yes,” and their responses are broken down according to their self-identified religious orientation (see Table 1). Ben-Rafael’s findings are consistent with Arian’s findings, as in 2008, 71 percent of *all* respondents opposed military exemptions. If the ultra-Orthodox respondents are excluded from the sample, the average rises to 74 percent. Of those favoring military exemptions, the national average is 14 percent, and it drops to 12 percent when the ultra-Orthodox are excluded. The non-religious and traditional categories reflect these averages, as 77 percent of the non-religious and 74 percent of the traditional oppose military exemptions, and 9 percent of the non-religious and 13 percent of the traditional respondents support military exemptions. Most likely, the respondents

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<sup>75</sup> Asher Arian, “Israeli Public Opinion on National Security 2003,” Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Memorandum no. 67 (October 2003): 37; available from [http://www.inss.org.il/upload/\(FILE\)1190276735.pdf](http://www.inss.org.il/upload/(FILE)1190276735.pdf); Internet; accessed 10 June 2009.

<sup>76</sup> Eliezer Ben-Rafael, “The Faces of Religiosity in Israel: Cleavages or Continuum?,” *Israel Studies* 13, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 113.

<b>Table 1: Attitudes toward Exemptions from the Military (n=971).</b>			
<i>Military service is crucial in Israel; should some groups be exempted - such as ultra-Orthodox youngsters, religious women, Arabs, or pacifists? (%)</i>			
	Opposed	Don't Really Know	Yes
Ultra-Orthodox (n=48)	27	23	50
Religious (n=95)	56	24	20
Traditional (n=334)	74	13	13
Non-religious (n=494)	77	14	9
Source: Eliezer Ben-Rafael, "The Faces of Religiosity in Israel: Cleavages or Continuum?," <i>Israel Studies</i> 13, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 113.			

from the previous two categories who favor military exemptions believe that either conscientious objectors ought to be granted exemptions or Arab-Israeli citizens should not be allowed to serve in the IDF.

The opinions of the religious and ultra-Orthodox respondents are more puzzling, and the significant number of respondents that chose the vague “don’t really know” option leaves much to speculation. For the religious respondents, of whom many are members of the National Religious Party, only 56 percent oppose the policy of military exemptions. This figure is indeed perplexing, because it is the national-religious segment of Israel’s Jewish population that is most committed to retaining every square inch of *Eretz Yisrael*. It seems reasonable to conjecture that people in the national-religious camp would want every able-bodied Jewish Israeli fighting on the front lines. This figure may indicate, however, that a large portion of the national-religious camp is content to carry the bulk of the burden of military service.

Like the religious respondents, the opinions of the ultra-Orthodox toward military exemptions are peculiar. The relatively high number of respondents who oppose military exemptions (27 percent) and the surprisingly low number who support exemptions (50

percent) do not seem consistent with the theory that the *haredi* communities demonstrate a wholesale approval of military exemptions for their young men. For this theory to be accurate, one would expect to see a far lower percentage opposing military exemptions (a negligible number consisting primarily of outliers) and a far higher percentage supporting military exemptions (representative of far more than just half of the respondents). One explanation is that this survey is not representative of the entire ultra-Orthodox population, as only 5 percent of the respondents are ultra-Orthodox. A more accurate study would need to incorporate 2-4 percent more ultra-Orthodox respondents. In spite of this limitation, the numbers are still unexpected. Just as the percentage of ultra-Orthodox men that serve in the IDF is far below the 27 percent of respondents who oppose military exemptions, so is the percentage of *haredi* men who do not serve far above the 50 percent who support exemptions.<sup>77</sup> Even if the groups mentioned in the question are isolated from one another – ultra-Orthodox youngsters, religious women, Arabs and pacifists – a suitable explanation for these ultra-Orthodox opinions is still elusive. The current numbers of exemptions for ultra-Orthodox youngsters proves that this exemption is highly popular in *haredi* circles. Furthermore, the highly conservative and patriarchal nature of the *haredi* communities makes it unlikely that *haredi* men would support military service for their women, and advocating military service for Arabs is even less likely, primarily due to the ethnocentric and xenophobic culture that pervades *haredi* society. That leaves the pacifists. If the pacifists mentioned in this survey are separated from any *haredim* who may have a pacifistic outlook and defined solely by their non-*haredi* religious beliefs, an explanation may be forthcoming. Since the *haredim* believe

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<sup>77</sup> Ben-Rafael, “The Faces of Religiosity,” 113.

that the true ‘holders’ of the Torah should be exempted from military service, they may also believe that all other Jewish Israelis who do not fully dedicate their lives to this virtuous endeavor should, in fact, serve in the IDF. In this scenario, the *haredim* would have to believe that exemptions are a privilege reserved only for the righteous; for those who do not seek to impart God’s protection to the Jewish people spiritually, their fate lies on the battlefield. Even this conclusion, however, is tenuous. The ultra-Orthodox responses to this survey question are truly confounding.

With the rise of groups such as *Yesh Gvul*, *Courage to Refuse*, *New Profile* and *Shministim*, a new twist has been added to the already controversial IDF conscription policy. Members of these groups advocate the right of an individual Jewish Israeli to decide if and when he/she wants to serve in the military. Yet unlike their fellow citizens in the *haredi* communities, the members of these protest groups do not rely on a formal governmental mechanism to legitimize their decision not to serve. Instead, they are often subjected to criminal charges of disobedience and chastised as deleterious citizens of the Israeli body politic. Herein lies a problem: the government acquiesces to the exemption of *haredi* youngsters, justifying its actions by claiming that it must respect *haredi* religious convictions. But when secular Israeli youth assert that their political orientation conflicts with military service, they are punished. Despite this apparent government hypocrisy, the Jewish Israeli public favors a true ‘universal’ conscription policy. A look at the data above clearly shows that the majority of Jewish Israelis are opposed to both conscientious objection and *haredi* military exemptions. For the bulk of the Jewish Israeli public, who belong neither to the secular, pacifistic crowd on the left nor to the

conservative, *haredi* communities on the right, military service should be borne equitably by all Jewish Israelis.

### *Conclusion*

This chapter discussed the significance of military service in Israeli society and explained the benefits that the Israeli citizen derives from it. It also described how *haredi* non-service has resulted in the marginalization of the *haredi* communities both socially and economically. Moreover, it provided a brief summary of the negative responses of conscripted Jewish Israelis to the policy of *haredi* exemptions. It then explored a situation strikingly similar to *haredi* yeshiva student exemptions – the conscientious objector movement – and followed with an in-depth analysis of Jewish Israeli public opinion on a range of topics related to Israel's conscription policy. In closing, the potential for an eruption of conflict as a result of this policy is possible. While there is not yet any evidence that this policy has produced a conflagration of violence between those who serve and those who do not, there is little reason to believe that Israeli society is immune from an aggressive and potentially violent solution to this conflict.

### Chapter Three

## The *Haredim* Do Not Want to Serve

The first hypothesis of this thesis asks if the majority of *haredi* yeshiva students do not serve in the IDF for the simple reason that they do not want to. In this scenario, it is not a religious objection or a moral imperative against violence and conflict that shapes their attitude to military service. On the contrary, *haredi* yeshiva students reject military service for reasons that are historical, social and communal. Thus, this chapter will begin by attempting to describe how the *haredi* communities perceive themselves in relation to the State of Israel. By analyzing their self-identification as Jews still in exile as well as their categorical rejection of Zionism, this chapter will show that the various sects of *haredim* operate as a distinct community not beholden to the predominant values and obligations that define the rest of Jewish Israeli society. It will then shed some light on the world of the yeshiva by describing the importance placed on the role of the Torah scholar and illustrating some of the fears that exist regarding the negative influence of contact with the IDF. This chapter will conclude by attempting to determine the extent to which these historical, social and communal factors induce young *haredi* males to eschew military service.

## *The Haredi Belief System*

The foundation of the *haredi* belief system begins with the destruction of the Second Jewish Temple in 70 C.E. Years after its destruction, the Jewish people were sent into exile, forcing them to set up communities across the globe. For centuries, the Jewish Diaspora resided in multiple nations and awaited their return to *Eretz Yisrael* (Hebrew for Land of Israel). Traditional Jewish history represents this period of exile as the great tragedy of the Jewish people. For the *haredim*, however, this exile of almost two millennia is presented as a direct message from God. It was a,

...divine punishment of the people of Israel, a sign from heaven that nonobservant Jews [did] not deserve a state of their own. Only through full Jewish repentance and strict observance of God's commandments [would] God forgive and redeem His people.<sup>78</sup>

This redemption would be realized by the coming of the Messiah, who would reveal Himself and usher His people back into *Eretz Yisrael*.

Late into the nineteenth century, the Jewish Diaspora remained in exile, assimilated into various nations around the world. At this point, small communities of religious Jews were living in Palestine. For most of the world's Jewry, however, Palestine was merely a destination for one's death and burial. It was not until a little known Eastern European Jewish journalist named Theodor Herzl popularized the concept of political Zionism that world Jewry began to dream of finally returning to *Eretz Yisrael*. While Zionism quickly gained a massive following, *haredi* communities spurned it, considering it apostasy, as the Messiah had not yet revealed Himself. For the *haredim*, God,

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<sup>78</sup> Ehud Sprinzak, *Brother Against Brother: Violence and Extremism in Israeli Politics from Altalena to the Rabin Assassination* (New York: The Free Press, 1999), 88.



...made it clear to His people that they were supposed to wait patiently until He decided they were deserving of redemption. He instructed them not to 'rebel' against the world's nations and not to initiate massive Jewish settlement in Eretz Israel [*sic*].<sup>79</sup>

As the Zionist ideology eventually gave way to the establishment of the State of Israel, the *haredim* did not alter their stance; the State of Israel was illegitimate and the two-thousand year exile of the Jewish people continued, uninterrupted.<sup>80</sup>

Indeed, large numbers of *haredim* immigrated to Israel at its independence, but this was primarily due to the fact that many were escaping the horrors of the Holocaust and had few options for sanctuary outside of Israel. What they found in Israel was a society that had rejected the traditional and religious tenets of Judaism in favor of liberal and secular values. Reacting to this discovery, the various *haredim* communities began to view themselves as the true keepers of Judaism, since the rest of Israeli society had, in their eyes, abandoned God and His blessings. As 'real Jews,' the *haredi* communities increasingly started to, "...perceive life in Israel as exile among Jews," connected to each other by, "...a sense of collective trauma resulting from the choice of the majority of Jewish society to leave the folds of traditional life in favor of other...options."<sup>81</sup> Owing to their religious worldview, most *haredim* in Israel do not recognize the State of Israel or its government. Their only concern is to ensure that historical Jewish traditions are not

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<sup>79</sup> Sprinzak, *Brother Against Brother*, 88-89.

<sup>80</sup> Aronoff, "Wars as Catalysts," 46.

<sup>81</sup> Yohai Hakak, "From the Army of G-d to the Israeli Armed Forces: An Interaction between Two Cultural Models," in *Gender, Religion and Change in the Middle East*, ed. Inger Marie Okkenhaug and Ingvild Flakerud (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 36 and Stadler, "Fundamentalism's Encounters," 219-220.

rendered obsolete – as nearly happened during the Holocaust – by modern Israeli society.<sup>82</sup>

Because *haredi* communities reject the State of Israel, they believe that they are *de facto* free of all civic duties, including military service. They claim that their communities existed in *Eretz Yisrael* long before Zionism emerged, so they are free to operate by their own standards and ignore the obligations incumbent on other Israeli citizens.

By summoning the history of the ultra-Orthodox rejection of Zionism...one essential element is missing from the social contract reasoning according to which Israelis all owe equal duties to state: the element of consent. The Haredim [*sic*]...not only withheld express consent to the Zionist project but offered unequivocal rejection of [it].<sup>83</sup>

From the *haredi* point-of view, they might be Israeli citizens, but they are in no way compelled to participate in the state's institutions. Because they opposed the State of Israel from the very beginning, the *haredim* do not feel as if they are indebted to the state. Military service is for those Jewish Israelis who associate with the state; the *haredi* communities disassociate themselves from the state and are therefore not responsible for its defense.

#### *Military Service and the Torah Scholar*

One reason that the *haredim* avoid military service is because the IDF is ideologically rooted in Zionism. Throughout its history, the IDF has ingrained in every soldier an existential connection to the state. This is unacceptable for *haredim*, as Jews

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<sup>82</sup> Stadler, "Other-Worldly Soldiers," 39.

<sup>83</sup> Mazie, *Israel's Higher Law*, 193.

should have only one spiritual and temporal connection, their link to God. Yohai Hakak observes that the *haredim* believe that the IDF,

...aims to exchange the attachment to G-d [*sic*] and religion with an attachment to a nation, rendering G-d [*sic*] and spiritual aspects redundant...other earthly issues – such as the quality, sophistication and readiness of the weaponry of the soldiers – are more relevant. Man and not G-d [*sic*] plays the central role.<sup>84</sup>

Anything that comes between the yeshiva student and God is considered a sin, and the student's devotion to God is uncompromising. Affinity for any worldly pleasure or object is strictly forbidden. Consequently, IDF service, in which the development of a love for Israel is a key component, is utterly dangerous and threatens to undermine the yeshiva student's steadfast commitment to God.

A poster observed by author Nurit Stadler in the ultra-Orthodox Jerusalem neighborhood of Meah Shearim demonstrates this attitude to military service. It reads, "Suicidal! Be all that you can be in the *Nahal*."<sup>85</sup> Ironically, the poster's mention of suicide does not allude to physical death. More accurately, it refers to spiritual death, the result of abandoning yeshiva studies to serve in the military. Although the young *haredi* male can return to the yeshiva after he serves, his decision to interrupt his Torah study is a transgression of the highest order. Study of religious texts is a lifelong undertaking. Deviation for any purpose, at any time during the student's life, is problematic for the scholar. Military service, in particular, corrupts the yeshiva student by removing him from his community and placing him in "...a highly dangerous and contaminated sphere

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<sup>84</sup> Hakak, "From the Army of G-d," 29.

<sup>85</sup> Stadler, "Playing with Sacred/Corporeal Identities," 155.

of action.”<sup>86</sup> This experience can prove to be disastrous for the Torah scholar, as it directly affects his ability to interpret God’s word. Hence,

...he is not suitable or fit for service in the army because of the physical and mental practices required of him as a studious man. A yeshivah [*sic*] student is supposed to possess a gentle and wise soul, and only this sensitivity allows him to study with utter devotion.<sup>87</sup>

If a yeshiva student chooses to enlist, his ability to scrutinize the scriptures will be forever altered. He cannot expect to return to his studies after military service with the same vigor that he once possessed. His value as a Torah scholar, then, is drastically reduced.

The fear that one’s ability to study the Torah will be affected by military service did not evolve in a vacuum. To be sure, *haredi* leaders have worked tirelessly to instill this line of thinking into the young and impressionable men in their communities. Stadler, Lomsky-Feder and Ben-Ari argue that, “attitudes to military service highlight the persistent attempt to preserve religious separateness from secular state activities in order to maintain the exclusive cultural values and life-styles of the ultra-Orthodox.”<sup>88</sup> Their reasons are two-fold, one official and one unspoken. *Haredi* leaders’ official justification for dissuading young men from enlisting in the IDF is to protect them from the secularizing effects of military service. One danger that they point to is the mingling of sexes in the IDF. *Haredi* men are instructed to avoid succumbing to physical and mental temptations with women. As such, young *haredi* men are usually kept away from

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<sup>86</sup> Stadler, “Playing with Sacred/Corporeal Identities,” 157.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 164-165.

<sup>88</sup> Stadler, “Fundamentalism’s Encounters,” 222.

interacting with women until they marry. In the IDF, where men and women serve in the same units, complete gender segregation is difficult to guarantee. Although the *Nahal* battalion is segregated from female soldiers, the chances that *haredi* men will encounter women in the army are still high. The temptation to interact with females in the army is far too risky for *haredi* leaders to allow their young men to enlist.<sup>89</sup>

In addition to the danger of mixing with the female gender, *haredi* leaders believe that the IDF will, "...expose *Haredi* [sic] to a corrupted youth culture," which will lead to the questioning of their traditions.<sup>90</sup> As has already been discussed, the IDF brings together myriad cultures and values. Since most IDF recruits are still in their late teens, they are very impressionable and susceptible to new ideas and beliefs. Yeshiva students are no exception.

Mixing with all types of Israelis, including secular Jews, traditional Jews and those who call themselves 'religious' Zionists, the young Haredi [*sic*] will hear perspectives on the world and Judaism he has never heard before and meet temptations he hasn't dreamt of.<sup>91</sup>

New ideas can have a devastating effect on the young *haredi* man, as they might lead the yeshiva student to doubt the existence of God or question His commandments. This would undoubtedly constitute an unforgivable sin. In order to protect yeshiva students from committing this sin, the *haredi* authorities believe that yeshiva students ought to avoid this venue of temptation altogether.

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<sup>89</sup> Hakak, "From the Army of G-d," 29.

<sup>90</sup> Stadler, "Other-Worldly Soldiers," 21.

<sup>91</sup> Mazie, *Israel's Higher Law*, 194.

### *Political Consequences of Haredi Enlistment*

What was previously discussed is the officially espoused *haredi* viewpoint. Yet, one other factor of IDF service quietly concerns *haredi* authorities. This concern involves numbers and power. *Haredi* leaders depend on strong and united *haredi* communities. Bigger communities lead to larger voting blocs, which in turn lead to stronger legislative powers in the Knesset. *Haredi* politicians need high levels of electoral support in order to more forcefully promote legislation that both provides increasing welfare benefits to *haredi* communities and pushes for more stringent religious regulations on public life in Israel. As such, *haredi* leaders cannot afford to lose members of their communities to other ways of life. It is precisely for this reason that *haredi* leaders discourage young *haredim* from enlisting in the military. They are afraid that the yeshiva student will be attracted to other worldviews offered to him in the army and leave the folds of the ultra-Orthodox community.<sup>92</sup> Should too many young *haredi* men choose this path, the thinking goes, the very survival of the *haredi* communities in Israel would be jeopardized.<sup>93</sup>

### *Social Repercussions of Military Service*

For yeshiva students themselves, fear of enlistment goes beyond the concern that it will affect their studies or damage their standing in the eyes of God. Indeed, enlistment can engender severe social consequences for the yeshiva student. Because the IDF is associated with Zionism, young *haredi* men cannot join without creating the impression

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<sup>92</sup> Stadler, "Other-Worldly Soldiers," 21.

<sup>93</sup> Stadler, "Playing with Sacred/Corporeal Identities," 157.

that they sympathize with the ideology of mainstream Israeli society. There is the fear among yeshiva students that any association with the Zionist enterprise automatically leads to difficulty in rising through the ranks of *haredi* society. Military service can affect one's ability to find employment in the community, and worse, hinder one's ability to marry and have children. Stadler and Ben-Ari quote a yeshiva student who voices this anxiety:

You have to understand that from a young age they get it into our heads that the army is an abomination, obscenity, that boys and girls are together all of the time... The eighteen-year-old members of the [*haredim*] are concerned to find a good match for marriage. Your stock goes up in direct proportion to the study of the Torah and any involvement in the army on the part of your family turns you immediately into a second class citizen.<sup>94</sup>

From this comment, it appears that *haredi* leaders have provoked a fear of military service by attaching a deleterious stigma to it. Having done so, *haredi* leaders utilize this fear as a mechanism for social control. Their power over the thought processes of the young *haredi* male population allows *haredi* authorities to preserve the 'sanctity' of their communities and present a united front against the secular currents of mainstream Israeli society. Deviation from community norms is anathema, and *haredi* leaders make sure that their members are well aware of the consequences of independent thought and action.

### *Conclusion*

From the information offered in this chapter, one can conclude that *haredi* yeshiva students evade military service for the simple reason that they do not want to serve. Because their historical traditions conflict with the very foundations of

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<sup>94</sup> Stadler, "Other-Worldly Soldiers," 43.

contemporary Israeli society, the *haredim* have placed themselves outside of the parameters of citizenship. They reject the State of Israel and thus refuse to acquiesce to the obligations incumbent of normal Israeli citizens. In addition, *haredi* yeshiva students believe that their studies will suffer if they choose to interrupt them by enlisting in the military. Since Torah study takes precedence over everything, the yeshiva student cannot expect to unravel the mysteries of God's word if he devotes any portion of his time to other considerations. Moreover, the *haredi* yeshiva student must remain pure. IDF service will expose the *haredi* youth to a world of transgression, and such an encounter can lead to a life-style that is devoid of God's divine blessings. Finally, *haredi* communities condemn the man that enlists in the IDF. Owing to a need to preserve communal homogeneity, *haredi* leaders indoctrinate their young men by warning them of the social repercussions of military service. As such, the *haredi* man who serves in the IDF can expect to return to his community as a corrupted member, and he will find it difficult, if not impossible, to be perceived as a member fully committed to the *haredi* way of life. In sum, while it can be concluded that *haredi* yeshiva students do not want to serve in the IDF, it might be more appropriate to conclude that they cannot serve. The social ramifications of military service are simply too difficult to endure.



## Chapter Four

### The *Haredim* Are Pacifists

The second hypothesis of this thesis posits that *haredi* yeshiva students do not serve in the IDF because they are pacifists. They refuse to participate in an institution that actively engages in war and violent conflict, and their rejection of military service is a political act of pacifism. On the surface, this hypothesis seems straightforward. A cursory glance of the *haredi* communities' political positions toward Israel's involvement in violent conflicts should prove or disprove this hypothesis. This is not the case. Indeed, Israel's *haredim* demonstrate a complex attitude to violence. Rhetorically, *haredi* traditions teach pacifism and restraint. There exists a consensual understanding that places a negative stigma on actions that result in the physical harm of a human being. In their actions, however, the *haredim* exhibit a strong propensity to violence, evidenced by a litany of aggressive incidents throughout their history in Israel. In an attempt to explain this apparent inconsistency between word and deed, this chapter will begin by examining the traditional *haredi* taboos associated with war and violence. It will then scrutinize *haredi* political views in the context of Israel's experience with war and peace. Furthermore, this chapter will supply the reader with several examples of *haredi* violence, aimed at both internal and external targets, and will conclude by analyzing how future generations of *haredim* may regard the use of violence. After all of this has been

presented, it will become clear that Israel's *haredim* possess a nuanced and incongruous notion of war and violent conflict.

### *Foundations of Haredi Pacifism*

As discussed in chapter three, Israel's *haredi* communities evince a passionate rejection of Zionism, the founding ideology of the State of Israel. They believe that the founders of the state committed a grave sin by initiating a nation-building project independent of both God's blessings and the revelation of the Messiah. Because of this idolatrous hubris, the majority of the *haredim* did not participate in any fighting during Israel's War of Independence. In 1947, Amram Blau, leader of the *haredi Neturei Karta* sect, told his brethren that the true Jewish believer avoids violence and conflict. Therefore, he claimed, they must stay away from the fighting. He summoned the history of the Jewish people to cement his point:

And after the destruction of the Temple and the exile of the People of Israel from its land, and after the Lord, Blessed be He, charged Israel not to rebel against the nations, there was no longer any possibility that Israel would have to resort to the sword, to cruelty and to bloodshed, God forbid. And it is two thousand years since Israel has returned its sword to the scabbard and has passed all the years of its exile in a different manner, one of submission and peace. Pliantly, it has faced all troubles and difficulties, and has greatly distanced itself from any sense of cruelty, not to mention murder and bloodshed. It has displayed a good and gentle spirit in its relations with the nations in whose lands it lives in exile. This pureness and innocence has been the glory of Israel in the eyes of the nations. And now there are some, who take the name of Israel, that have begun to resort to bloody hands, to turn the name of Israel known for its measure of compassion into one associated with murder and bloodshed, God forbid, to garb the People of Israel in clothing stained with blood. Even from the blood of their brethren they do not abstain, God forbid (*Ha'Homa* [The Wall], *Neturei Karta* journal, Kislev, December 1947).<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Menachem Friedman, "Haredim and Palestinians in Jerusalem," in *Jerusalem: A City and Its Future*, ed. Marshall J. Breger and Ora Ahimeir (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 242.

In addition to Blau's message to the Jewish people in Palestine, Agudat Israel, the *haredi* political party in Mandate Palestine, condemned the violent tactics of the Jewish insurgent groups such as the *Irgun* and *Lehi*. It declared, "terrorism is an alien branch in the vineyard of loyal Judaism, a rotten fruit of secular political parties which educate for the admiration of power of the fist and the hands of Esau."<sup>96</sup> From these statements, it is clear war and violence were anathema to the *haredim* of the Mandate Period. As God's chosen people, they argued, Jews are morally and ethically above the resort to violence. For the *haredi* yeshiva students of today's Israel, this is certainly a legitimate justification for avoiding military service. They might assert that the true Jew is a pacifist, an anointed man who opposes war and violence in all forms, at all times. Gentiles wage war, they might say, not Jews.

#### *Haredi Political Views*

Given this information, it comes as somewhat of a surprise that many non-*haredi* Israelis believe that the *haredim* possess intense right-wing, hawkish political views. Nurit Stadler claims these political attitudes are manifested by, "...Haredi [*sic*] support for intensive military activity in the occupied territories, and...[the] general Haredi [*sic*] approval of the army's actions during the recent Intifadas."<sup>97</sup> Regarding the issue of military exemptions, Chaim I. Waxman adds that these political views cause much

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<sup>96</sup> Sprinzak, *Brother Against Brother*, 104.

<sup>97</sup> Stadler, "Playing with Sacred/Corporeal Identities," 162.

friction with the majority of Israelis over the policy of military exemptions for *haredi* yeshiva students. According to Waxman, "...there [is] resentment...over their Right-wing [sic] politics because their votes may move the country to a war in which they [yeshiva students] will not fight."<sup>98</sup> Is there truth to these allegations? Do the *haredim* demonstrate a right-wing bias? The data certainly point to this conclusion.

Using data collected by the Peace Index project team of the Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research at Tel Aviv University, Tamar Hermann and Ephraim Yuchtman-Yarr analyzed eighty-three surveys conducted between June 1994 and January 2001, each survey including approximately five hundred randomly selected Jewish Israelis aged eighteen and over. With the results of these surveys, the authors placed each respondent into "Right," "Floating," and "Left" categories based on their aggregate voting behavior. Of the respondents who identified themselves as *haredi*, the authors classified the voting behavior of 79.3 percent as "Right," 18.3 percent as "Floating" (middle) and 2.4 percent as "Left."<sup>99</sup> Whereas this data suggest that the *haredi* communities exhibit right-wing voting behavior, other data indicate that, along with the majority of the Jewish Israeli population, the *haredi* demographic belongs to the moderate/center category of the political spectrum. As part of their larger study, "The People Speak: Israeli Public Opinion on National Security 2005-2007," Yehuda Ben Meir and Dafna Shaked submitted a questionnaire in 2006 to 724 Jewish Israeli respondents.

The questionnaire consisted of fifteen questions relating to Israel's national security, and

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<sup>98</sup> Chaim I. Waxman, "Religion in the Israeli Public Square," in *Jews in Israel: Contemporary Social and Cultural Patterns*, ed. Uzi Rebhun and Chaim I. Waxman (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2004), 234.

<sup>99</sup> Tamar Hermann and Ephraim Yuchtman-Yaar, "Divided Yet United: Israeli-Jewish Attitudes toward the Oslo Process," *Journal of Peace Research* 39, no. 5 (September 2002): 609.

the aggregate results of each questionnaire were plotted along an axis that included the categories, “extreme left,” “moderate left,” “center,” “moderate right,” and “extreme right.” Based on their responses, 2 percent (1 respondent) of the 63 self-identified *haredi* respondents landed in the extreme left category; 6 percent (4 respondents) landed in the moderate left category; 56 percent (35 respondents) landed in the center category; 6 percent (4 respondents) landed in the moderate right category; and 30 percent (19 respondents) landed in the extreme right category.<sup>100</sup> From these statistics, it is apparent that while the *haredim* may vote for right-wing political parties, their political opinions do not necessarily reflect a hard-line conservative outlook. At the same time, however, exceptional events such as the al-Aqsa Intifada and the 2006 Lebanon War have a centrifugal effect on *haredi* political opinions in much the same way that they do on the Jewish Israeli population as a whole. What still needs to be determined is how similar are the shifts in these opinions, and do the *haredim* tend to move further to the right during times of conflict than do the rest of the Jewish Israeli population?

Before answering these questions, it is important to understand what factors advise the political perspectives of Israel’s *haredi* communities. In particular, why does the voting behavior of the *haredim* tend to favor right-wing political candidates? The reasons are both cultural and historical. Culturally, Israel’s *haredi* communities are isolated and exclusive. Membership in the *haredi* communities requires individuals to withdraw from mainstream, secular Israeli society and embrace a bunker mentality, as interaction with the non-*haredi* world threatens the religious purity of their lifestyle.

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<sup>100</sup> Ben Meir, “The People Speak,” pp. 32.

Resulting from this practice is an acute sense of ethnocentricity. Jonathan Rynhold provides an instructive perspective of this phenomenon:

...Religion generates a sense of an in-group and an out-group that serves to encourage an ethnocentric orientation...This religious basis for group differentiation gives ethnocentricity a reified quality that heightens its resonance...This is especially relevant to the Jewish religious tradition, which places God's covenantal relationship with the Jewish people (rather than with the individual) at its center.<sup>101</sup>

Certainly, Jewish Israelis define their Jewishness in multiple ways. For secular Jews in Israel who observe little to no religious traditions, Jewishness is an ethnic concept, rooted in an ancient and common history. As their identity is defined by being Israeli as much as it is as being Jewish, most secular Jewish Israelis show few palpable signs of ethnocentricity. On the other end of the spectrum, Israel's *haredi* communities observe all Jewish religious traditions, and they rarely, if ever, define themselves as Israeli. Because they believe that only through complete adherence to Jewish religious commandments and absolute faith in God can the Messiah reveal Himself, the *haredim* reject all alternative lifestyles and codes of morality. Consequently, the *haredim* exhibit a strong ethnocentric antipathy not only toward non-*haredi* Jewish Israelis but also toward non-Jewish Israelis and Israel's Arab neighbors. The political upshot of this ethnocentricity is revealed through hawkish political attitudes, and thus, political movements based on the liberal tenets of freedom, justice and equality do not infiltrate the *haredi* communities.<sup>102</sup> Accordingly, when a political candidate espouses conservative views, he/she will more likely than not secure the vote of the *haredim*.

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<sup>101</sup> Jonathan Rynhold, "Religion, Postmodernization, and Israeli Approaches to the Conflict with the Palestinians," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 17, no. 3 (Spring/Summer 2005): 381.

*Haredi* partiality towards right-wing politicians is also rooted in a series of historical events beginning with the 1967 War. After the IDF subdued its enemies in the lightning-quick Six-Day War, Israel found itself in possession of East Jerusalem and the biblical territories of Judea and Samaria. For nearly two decades before the war, these plots of land had merely been the object of intense dreams and desires. Now, in 1967, Jewish Israelis could travel freely to these destinations and landmarks that played such a significant role in ancient Jewish history. Following this development, popular political rhetoric in Israel began incorporating religious – even messianic – symbols, as the surprise victory and reclamation of ancient Jewish lands were framed in terms that credited God with this unimaginable triumph. Although the *haredim* did not – and still do not – assign significance to the landmass that is Israel and the disputed territories, they nevertheless warmed to the segments of mainstream Israeli society that shifted away from rigidly secular political oratory toward a religio-political platform. Unsurprisingly, these segments belonged primarily to the political Right.<sup>103</sup>

*Haredi* participation in politics may have waned in subsequent years as the moderate-left Labor Party maintained uninterrupted control of Israel for the next decade. However, with the paradigm-shifting victory of the right-wing Likud Party in 1977, the *haredim* found political leadership more in tune with the interests of their ultra-Orthodox lifestyle. Menachem Begin, the leader of the Likud Party, both emphasized the uniqueness of the Jewish people and identified with the elements of the public who observed Jewish religious tradition. As such, the *haredim* began to feel as if they had

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<sup>102</sup> Rynhold, “Religion, Postmodernization,” 381 and Ben Meir, “The People Speak,” 33.

<sup>103</sup> Rynhold, “Religion, Postmodernization,” 383.

more in common with the new right-wing government in Israel than with previous left-leaning incarnations.<sup>104</sup>

Since Begin's government in the late 1970s / early 1980s, the *haredim* have expanded their role in politics. Interestingly, their political support alters between right- and left-wing governments. Despite the perception that they perpetually gravitate toward right-wing candidates, in reality, the *haredim* back candidates that promise to advance their sectarian interests. For example, the *haredim* look for candidates who promise to subsidize their way of life by providing massive chunks of welfare for unemployed *haredi* men and their large families, funding for religious schools and synagogues, and segregated government housing blocs. Moreover, *haredi* voters favor candidates who pledge to place religious restrictions on Israeli public life. These voters seek,

...to implement Talmudic law by enacting national legislation such as prohibiting work or public transportation on Shabbat, as well as the sale of non-kosher food [because] their religious convictions command them to involve themselves in all Jewish matters, including the lives of secular Jews.<sup>105</sup>

Aside from these interests, the *haredi* vote is normally based on little else. Unlike the national-religious camp, the *haredim* are not concerned with retaining every square inch of *Eretz Yisrael*, and they therefore do not recognize the utility of involving themselves in matters relating to the wider Israeli-Palestinian conflict – unless, of course, it is to prod the Israeli government into protecting *haredi* settlements in the disputed territories, in

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<sup>104</sup> Rynhold, "Religion, Postmodernization," 384.

<sup>105</sup> Ben-Rafael, "The Faces of Religiosity," 94.



which case, any politician, right or left, who promises to safeguard these communities usually wins the support of the *haredim*.<sup>106</sup>

The previous paragraphs have detailed the bases of *haredi* political opinion and voting behavior. Yet while this information is true, it is also presented in a vacuum; more specifically, the aforementioned argument is best confirmed during times of relative peace and stability. For, in times of violent conflict, *haredi* political opinion takes on much different form, and more than any other demographic in Israel, violent conflict pushes the *haredim* furthest to the Right. Data provided by Asher Arian's "Israeli Public Opinion on National Security 2003" illuminates this thesis. In his study, Arian tracks the responses of Jewish Israelis to the same question from three separate years – 1994, 1999, and 2003. The question asks if official treaties signify the end of conflict, and Arian records the number of respondents who "strongly agree" and "agree." He then separates the respondents into four categories based on the extent of their religious observance: "none" or secular, "some" or traditional, "most" or Orthodox, and "all" or ultra-Orthodox. The significance of the years Arian chooses to compare lies in each year's association with peace and conflict. For instance, 1994 followed a year in which both the First Intifada came to a close and the Oslo Accords were signed. In 1999, the general mood was hopeful as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict seemed to be nearing a resolution after several successive treaties and agreements were signed over the past six years. Finally, 2003 was two years after the al-Aqsa Intifada erupted, and few could envision an end to the horrific daily displays of violence and bloodshed. Of the three years, 1994 appears to be the control year across the board, as the responses of all four categories in

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<sup>106</sup> Rynhold, "Religion, Postmodernization," 381-382, 384.

this year are almost the exact mean of the responses from 1999 and 2003. A look at Table 2 shows that all categories in 1999 responded more positively to the question than they did in 1994, and all categories in 2003 responded more negatively than in 1994. The ultra-Orthodox respondents dropped from an astonishing 40 percent agreement with the question in 1999 to a dismal 13 percent in 2003, a total decline of 27 percent. Orthodox responses fell 21 percent over this period, from 51 percent agreement in 1999 to 30 percent agreement in 2003. The traditional and secular respondents expressed an even greater change of opinion from 1999 to 2003, even though their disagreement with the question was nowhere near the negative attitudes of the ultra-Orthodox respondents.

<b>Table 2: Religious Breakdown of those Affirming that Treaties Signify End of Conflict, 1994, 1999, and 2003.</b> (Percentage of those who strongly agree and agree)				
Religious Observance ->	None	Some	Most	All
1994	59	50	34	26
1999	77	72	51	40
2003	44	38	30	13
Source: Asher Arian, "Israeli Public Opinion on National Security 2003," Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Memorandum no. 67 (October 2003): pp. 26.				

Traditionalists and Secularists decreased 34 percent and 33 percent respectively, with the former falling from 72 percent agreement in 1999 to 38 percent in 2003 and the latter shrinking from 77 percent agreement in 1999 to 44 percent in 2003.<sup>107</sup> From these figures, it is clear that violent conflict pushes *all* Jewish Israelis to the Right. While violent conflict creates a greater degree of opinion shift among Traditionalists and Secularists than the Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox, it nevertheless pushes the *haredim*

<sup>107</sup> Arian, "Israeli Public Opinion on National Security 2003," 26.

furthest to the Right. These figures also reveal that even during times of relative peace, the *haredim* are equally or more pessimistic about the prospects for peace than are the Secularists and Traditionalists during times of intense conflict. It seems, then, that the *haredim* are, at all times, more right-wing than the rest of the Jewish Israeli population.

Arian's work in "Israeli Public Opinion on National Security 2001" advances the argument that the *haredim* adopt stronger right-wing views during times of violent conflict than the rest of Jewish Israeli society. Drawn from surveys conducted between April 12, 2001 and May 11, 2001, Arian reports the opinions of 1,216 Jewish Israeli respondents during the seventh month of the bloody and traumatic al-Aqsa Intifada. One of his surveys asks respondents to gauge their support or opposition to the peace projects of then-Prime Minister Ehud Barak (i.e. 1999 peace talks with Syria, 2000 Camp David Accords with Palestinians). The response choices are "strongly oppose," "oppose," "support," and "strongly support," and like the previous table, the respondents are identified by the extent of their religious observance. A full 90 percent (see Table 3) of the respondents categorized as observing all religious tradition strongly opposed or opposed Barak's proposals. Compared to those who observe most religious tradition (79 percent), some religious tradition (54 percent), and no religious tradition (42 percent), the ultra-Orthodox were by far the most anti-peace religious demographic. Furthermore, a mere 10 percent of the ultra-Orthodox supported or strongly supported Barak's peace plans, compared with 21 percent of those who observe most, 36 percent of those who observe some, and 58 percent who observe no religious tradition. Most intriguing from these statistics is that 4 times more ultra-Orthodox respondents (52 percent) strongly opposed these peace plans than did secular respondents who strongly supported them (13

percent).<sup>108</sup> While this may be an indication that the general Jewish Israeli mood was not optimistic about the possibility of peace at the time, it nevertheless shows that the *haredim* were far more anti-peace than the secular were pro-peace. This is most certainly a reflection of how severely the current violent conflict had affected every Jewish Israeli's political views.

<b>Table 3: Support or Opposition to the Barak Proposals Broken Down by Religious Observance (%)</b>				
Religious Observance	Strongly Oppose	Oppose	Support	Strongly Support
Observe all	52	38	8	2
Observe most	34	45	20	1
Observe some	25	39	32	4
Observe none	15	27	45	13
Source: Asher Arian, "Israeli Public Opinion on National Security 2001," Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Memorandum no. 60 (August 2001): pp. 38.				

An additional survey by Arian in 2001 paints a more disturbing picture. He presents the statement, "There is no military solution to the conflict," to the respondents and asks them to place themselves in the categories of "disagree," "middle," and "agree." Again, he breaks down the respondents according to the extent of their religious observance. Interestingly, all four religious groups hovered around 12-13 percent in the ambivalent "middle" category (see Table 4). Of the respondents who observed all religious tradition, more than a quarter agreed with the statement, as did 51 percent of the respondents who observed no religious tradition. However, 59 percent of the ultra-

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<sup>108</sup> Arian, "Israeli Public Opinion on National Security 2001," 38.

<b>Table 4: Military Solution to the Conflict Broken Down by Religious Observance (%)</b>  Question: " <i>There is no military solution to the conflict.</i> "			
Religious Observance	Disagree	Middle	Agree
Observe all	59	12	29
Observe most	54	13	33
Observe some	49	13	38
Observe none	37	12	51
Source: Asher Arian, "Israeli Public Opinion on National Security 2001," Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Memorandum no. 60 (August 2001): pp. 37.			

Orthodox respondents disagreed with the statement, believing that there was a military solution to the conflict. At the same time, more than one-third of the secular respondents and almost half of the traditional respondents found a military solution to be a viable option.<sup>109</sup> When compared to Table 3, the opinions of the secular and traditional respondents are stable. The 51 percent of the Secularists who did not believe there was a military solution to the conflict are in line with the 58 percent of Secularists who supported and strongly supported Barak's peace proposals. Similarly, the 38 percent of Traditionalists who agreed that the conflict could not be solved through military means mirrors the 36 percent of Traditionalists who supported and strongly supported Barak's peace plans. This correlation, however, does not apply to the ultra-Orthodox respondents. Whereas only 10 percent of the ultra-Orthodox supported or strongly supported Barak's peace policy, almost three times as many ultra-Orthodox respondents (29 percent) agreed that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict could not be solved with military action. To be sure,

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<sup>109</sup> Arian, "Israeli Public Opinion on National Security 2001," 37.

these figures demonstrate that the vast majority of ultra-Orthodox *haredim* do not consider a peaceful resolution to the conflict to be feasible, placing them squarely in the right-wing camp. But questions linger as to the logic of the *haredi* respondents who agreed that the military could not bring the conflict to a close. If there was no military solution to the conflict, and Barak's strategy for settling the conflict peacefully was unacceptable, how then did this 29 percent imagine that peace could be attained? Perhaps they believed that God would divinely usher in an era of peace, or perhaps they did not want peace at all.

A 2004/2005 study substantiates the findings from Table 4, indicating that the *haredim* are more likely than the rest of Jewish Israeli society to condone a disproportionate use of military force to counter acts of terrorism. Table 5 displays data that was gathered by the National Security Studies Center at the University of Haifa. Over a period of four years – October 2000 through April 2004 – Daphna Canetti-Nisim, Eran Zaidise and Ami Pedahzur conducted eight identical telephone surveys with approximately 1,640 Jewish Israelis, in which they asked the respondents to indicate their support for various militant statements. For the purpose of this study, one particular statement stands out: "All means are justified in Israel's war against terror."<sup>110</sup> The data show that in seven out of eight surveys, the *haredim* favored unleashing the IDF on terrorists by an average margin that is almost 5 percent higher than the rest of Israel's Jews. Realistically, this disparity does not reveal much of a difference between the *haredim* and the other Jewish respondents, as the vast majority of Jewish Israelis

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<sup>110</sup> Daphna Canetti-Nisim, Eran Zaidise and Ami Pedahzur, "Militant Attitudes among Israelis throughout the al-Aqsa Intifada," *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics & Culture* 11, no. 3/4 (2004/2005): 108.

<b>Table 5: Percentage of Support for Militant Statements: Israeli Jews (total) and <i>Haredim</i>, October 2000 - April 2004</b>								
"All means are justified in Israel's war against terror."								
Date:	Oct. 2000	Apr. 2001	Oct. 2001	Apr. 2002	Oct. 2002	Apr. 2003	Oct. 2003	Apr. 2004
Jews (total)	79.3	77.2	81.2	80.2	78.1	76.6	74.4	77.1
<i>Haredim</i>	79	81.5	86.4	87.4	81.4	78	79.9	84.8
Source: Daphna Canetti-Nisim, Eran Zaidise and Ami Pedahzur, "Militant Attitudes among Israelis throughout the al-Aqsa Intifada," <i>Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics &amp; Culture</i> 11, no. 3/4 (2004/2005): 108.								

displayed extremely high levels of acceptance for heavy-handed military tactics during the al-Aqsa Intifada. Nevertheless, these data are consistent with the bulk of the data already discussed in this chapter: the *haredim* are more right-wing than the rest of Jewish Israeli society, even if they are so by a mere 5 percent.

One final table shows just how large a gap exists between the political opinions of the *haredim* and Israel's less- or non-religious Jewish populations. The following figures come from the same 2006 survey conducted by Yehuda Ben Meir and Dafna Shaked. These researchers asked respondents to react to four central issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and then cataloged their responses into four main religious groups. The results substantiate the claim in this thesis that the ultra-Orthodox are considerably more right-wing in their political outlook than most of the Jewish Israeli population. Asked if they believed that there was a possibility of reaching a peace agreement with the Palestinians, 11 percent of the ultra-Orthodox concurred, compared with 21 percent religious, around 33 percent of the traditionalists and 44 percent of the secular respondents (see Table 6). As to whether the respondents would support a peace

<b>Table 6: Major Issues of Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Broken Down by Religious Affiliation (%)</b>				
Issue	Ultra-Orthodox	Religious	Traditional	Secular
Possibility of Reaching Peace Agreement with Palestinians	11	21	~33	44
Agreement Involving neither Major Territorial Concessions nor Disengagement with Minor Ones	84	79	46	37
Support for Gaza Disengagement	10	15	~50	67
Agreement to Palestinian State	21	36	67	76
Source: Yehuda Ben Meir and Dafna Shaked, "The People Speak: Israeli Public Opinion on National Security 2005-2007," The Institute for National Security Studies, Memorandum no. 90 (May 2007): pp. 40.				

agreement that involved major territorial concessions or at least minor concessions as part of a disengagement strategy, 84 percent of the ultra-Orthodox opposed this approach, as did 79 percent religious, 46 percent traditional and 37 percent secular. Ten percent of the ultra-Orthodox supported former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's Gaza disengagement plan, with 15 percent of the religious respondents supporting, about half of the traditionalists supporting, and 67 percent of the secular respondents favoring the policy. Finally, when faced with the question of whether they would agree to the establishment of a Palestinian state, 21 percent of the ultra-Orthodox respondents replied in the affirmative, in contrast to 36 percent religious, 67 percent traditional, and 76 percent



secular.<sup>111</sup> Once more, the data suggest that Israel's *haredim* are the most right-wing and non-pacifistic religious demographic in present-day Israel.

After studying this data, it is necessary to return to the primary thesis question of this research: why do the majority of young *haredi* males not serve in the IDF? There appears to be a major inconsistency between the opinions and rhetoric of the *haredim* and their actions. If 90 percent of the *haredim* oppose peace proposals and a further 59 percent believe that there is a military solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, why have the numbers of exempted *haredim* skyrocketed over the decades? Is there some truth to the belief of many Jewish Israelis that the *haredim* are pushing Israel into a war in which they will not fight?

### *Episodes of Haredi Violence*

In present-day Israel, the *haredi* pacifistic tenets of old are not readily observable in their interactions with other Jewish Israelis. Because of the predominance of Zionist ideology in Israeli society, the *haredim* feel threatened by secular currents and believe that they are, in effect, "...constantly at war to defend [their] way of life."<sup>112</sup> Soon after Israeli independence, concrete signs of this war became manifest. The same man who spoke out against the Jewish resort to violence and war, Amram Blau, emerged as the leader of the *Neturei Karta* ("Guardians of the City"), a radical contingent of the *haredi* sect *Eda Haredit*. This sect declared:

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<sup>111</sup> Ben Meir, "The People Speak," 40.

<sup>112</sup> Menachem Friedman, "Haredi Violence in Contemporary Society," in *Jews and Violence: Images, Ideologies, Realities, Studies in Contemporary Jewry XVIII*, ed. Peter Y. Medding (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 191.

God is our king and we are His servants. It is our obligation and calling to preserve His teaching, and since we do not recognize the rule of the infidels, because they are rebels against the kingdom of our Creator-King be blessed, it is forbidden to obey and work for a rebellious regime. Our Torah is our constitution and...under no condition can we respect their [the Zionists'] laws.<sup>113</sup>

Blau firmly believed that he had an obligation to God to oppose the Israeli regime, and he instructed his followers to take a proactive approach in resisting the secularizing tide of Zionist ideology. Blau's preferred method of resistance was protest. In the 1950s, he organized a succession of mass demonstrations in Jerusalem protesting Sabbath desecration. For five years, he and his followers harassed drivers who dared to pass through the *haredi* neighborhood of Mea Shearim on the Sabbath. When the police arrived to disperse the demonstrators, members of Neturei Karta escalated the fracas, sometimes violently. In the ensuing struggles, the police responded with mass beatings and arrests.<sup>114</sup> Since then, thousands of radical *haredim* have turned out to protest countless Israeli projects in Jerusalem, most notably of which occurred in the 1980s, when they demonstrated against the excavation of ancient Hebrew Jerusalem in the City of David and the building of a Brigham Young University facility on the Mount of Olives.<sup>115</sup>

Over the years, *haredi* protests have become increasingly violent. No longer are their rallies confined to simple demonstrations. To be sure, their tactics have intensified to include riots, beatings, break-ins, rock throwing and firebombing.<sup>116</sup> The most

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<sup>113</sup> Sprinzak, *Brother Against Brother*, 90-91.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 94.

egregious examples of *haredi* aggression transpired in the mid- to late- 1980s, when a young *haredi* yeshiva student named Yehuda Meshi-Zahav entered the scene. While Blau placed limits on the extent to which he actively opposed Zionism, Meshi-Zahav had no such conviction. As the ‘operations chief’ of the *haredi* activists, Meshi-Zahav planned intricate assaults on Zionist targets. In 1986, he coordinated several attacks on bus stops in and around Jerusalem that featured profane advertisements depicting women in bikinis. Over 700 of his acolytes, which included members of *Eda Haredit*, the Satmar Hasidics and students of the Toldot Aharon yeshiva, raided 142 bus stops, completely destroying 48 of them by fire.<sup>117</sup> On February 9, 1989, Meshi-Zahav was arrested following 15 attacks on Zionist targets between August 1988 and February 1989. During his interrogation, police suspected that Meshi-Zahav had formed a new group, *Keshet* (“a group that would not keep silent”), which was planning attacks of epic proportion. Their suspicion was confirmed when police discovered that *Keshet* had placed several explosives along the highway connecting Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv.<sup>118</sup> Despite these crimes, Meshi-Zahav was eventually released, only to reappear at the site of a skirmish between border police and Palestinians during the al-Aqsa Intifada. Questioned by reporters as to the reason for his appearance, Meshi-Zahav replied that he was, “...observ[ing] new methods of fighting the Zionists.”<sup>119</sup>

Unlike Meshi-Zahav, who directed his assaults primarily at external targets, much violence exists within the *haredi* communities. This violence focuses on *haredi*

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<sup>117</sup> Sprinzak, *Brother Against Brother*, 96-97.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 99.

individuals who are perceived to be either actively engaged in sin and profanation or overly conciliatory to Zionist representatives and institutions. Two examples are worth mentioning. The first example involves a group of *haredim* who are known as the *mishmeret hazenu'it* (sexual modesty guard). Not only does this group physically assault prostitutes in *haredi* neighborhoods, but it also interferes in the romantic relationships of unmarried *haredi* men and women who are seen together in public places. In many cases, the guard's encounters with couples involve violent threats and beatings.<sup>120</sup> The second example occurred in June 1984 when a large group of yeshiva students belonging to the *Gur Hasidic* sect attacked Menachem Porush, an ultra-Orthodox member of the Knesset. Porush, whom the students believed sympathized with Zionist members in the Knesset, was 60-years-old at the time of the attack. After the students battered him relentlessly, Porush was taken to the intensive care unit of a hospital where he remained for two weeks.<sup>121</sup>

Although Porush's beating and Meshi-Zahav's tactics are horrific, instances such as these are unique in the *haredi* world. By and large, *haredi* aggression is limited to protests and inflammatory rhetoric. This is principally because the *haredim* do, in fact, place an inherent value on Jewish life. Ehud Sprinzak contends that the *haredim* operate under a concept of 'limited violence,' "...based on the belief that Jewish life, including the life of the secular, is sacred and the killing of Jews is absolutely forbidden."<sup>122</sup> Due to a general compliance with this concept, no deaths have been ascribed to *haredi* violence,

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<sup>120</sup> Friedman, "Haredi Violence," 193-194.

<sup>121</sup> Sprinzak, *Brother Against Brother*, 107.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 103.

and the cases of *haredi* violence resulting in life-threatening physical injuries are rare.

Friedman adequately describes this phenomenon:

Haredi [*sic*] society is clearly unusual in that the potential for violence within it does not culminate in bloodshed but rather is defined, circumscribed and controlled...by means of education that penetrates deeply into haredi [*sic*] consciousness.<sup>123</sup>

Just as Amram Blau once instructed, the true Jewish believer does not pick up the sword.

### *The Future of Haredi Violence*

Notwithstanding the conventional taboo against violence, there are reasons to believe that there will be an escalation of *haredi* violence in the future. First, Israel has been building new *haredi* neighborhoods in the territories outside the limits of the ‘Green Line.’ Because these housing units are far cheaper than those in and around Jerusalem and more suited to the average *haredi* income, many *haredi* families have chosen to move into these neighborhoods and create new *haredi* communities. As residents of these controversial territories, the *haredim* may witness the extremist behavior of Israel’s settler communities and begin to emulate the settlers’ violent activities. Although the *haredim* do not share the same patriotic feelings as the national-religious settlers, they may nevertheless feel a certain obligation to protect the settlements through the use of violent force.<sup>124</sup> Second, military exemptions for yeshiva students extend to ‘born-again’ Jews. In many cases, these newly religious individuals are criminals and delinquents who have not been inculcated with the demand for a strict adherence to *haredi* traditions.

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<sup>123</sup> Friedman, “Haredi Violence,” 189.

<sup>124</sup> Friedman, “*Haredim* and Palestinians,” 252-253.

Thus, these individuals have not been imbued with the traditional *haredi* concepts of restraint and limited violence. For the newly religious individuals who are especially zealous, their newfound religion may compel them to act out in a violent fashion against Zionist targets, if only so they may demonstrate proof of their total devotion to God.<sup>125</sup> Finally, the *haredim* are, for all intents and purposes, a fundamentalist group. As such, they share many of the same traits and tendencies with other religio-ideological fundamentalist groups, most notably Christian and Islamic. Unfortunately over the past three decades, the world has borne witness to the type of carnage that a religiously motivated fundamentalist group can wreak. To be sure, the *haredim* in Israel have never perpetrated acts of extreme terror or mass murder. However, the high frequency of religiously inspired attacks around the world leads many to speculate over the extent to which these acts of violence influence the *haredim*. Ultimately, Israel's *haredim* may attempt to replicate these catastrophic acts of violence at some point in the future.<sup>126</sup>

### *Conclusion*

This chapter began by asking if *haredi* yeshiva students do not serve in the IDF because they are pacifists who reject all forms of violence. Through an examination of this hypothesis, evidence arose that both corroborated and contradicted this statement. The *haredim* began to exhibit anti-militaristic tendencies as early as Israel's War for Independence, as most *haredim* believed that the Jewish people were ethically superior to those who practiced war, so they refused to take up arms and fight during this critical

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<sup>125</sup> Friedman, "Haredi Violence," 195-196.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 195.

period in Israel's history. In addition, the *haredim* are the most right-wing religious demographic in present-day Israel. Not only do the *haredim* overwhelmingly reject peace overtures *en masse*, but they also endorse severe military actions to resolve the conflict with Israel's neighbors. Furthermore, ample evidence revealed episodes of *haredi* communal violence directed outwardly at Zionist targets and inwardly at deviant *haredim*. Despite these incidents, this violence is characterized not by excess, but by restraint. As the *haredim* assign a precious value to all Jewish life, their violence usually stops short of extremes that result in death. This chapter ended by offering three reasons why *haredi* violence may escalate in the future. Although future violence is by no means imminent, the potential for it certainly exists.

In the final analysis, the *haredi* tradition of adherence to principles of non-violence and pacifism seems to be a legitimate justification for yeshiva students' avoidance of military service, and episodes of *haredi* violence appear to represent more of an aberration than the norm of traditional *haredi* values. At the same time, the data cannot be ignored, as it clearly illustrates a *haredi* community that does not necessarily evince a pacifistic political outlook. While it would be satisfying to believe that the *haredi* traditions of pacifism and non-violence extend to the political realm, evidence for this conclusion is lacking. The exceptionally hawkish *haredi* political opinions outlined in this chapter leaves no choice but to conclude that *haredi* yeshiva student military exemptions cannot be justified on the basis of a distinct and exhibited aversion to war and violence.

## Chapter Five

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### Jewish Religious Tradition

The third and final hypothesis of this thesis claims that *haredi* yeshiva students do not serve in the IDF because Jewish religious law forbids military service. Militaries are institutions that are inherently tied to violent conflict. As such, military participation contravenes the yeshiva students' quest for a spiritually pure and peaceful existence. To be sure, yeshiva students scrutinize religious texts in order to preserve historical and communal traditions. Moreover, their studies contribute to the maintenance of the righteous and unique characteristics of the Jews as a pacifistic people. However, after much analysis, the evidence for this hypothesis reveals that, in the context of contemporary Israeli society, yeshiva students possess a convoluted understanding of their role as religious scholars. In fact, *haredi* yeshiva students utilize militaristic terminology to describe their responsibilities. By referring to the Torah as a weapon and comparing the labor of a yeshiva student to that of a soldier, *haredi* yeshiva students project a notion that they represent a quintessential component participating in the physical protection of the Jewish people. In unpacking this notion, this chapter will show that the *haredim* base their belief in the protective power of the yeshiva student on a historical precedent dating back to the ancient Israelite people. It will then explain the ways in which the *haredim* assign war-like properties to the Torah and conclude by examining the concept that the yeshiva student is analogous to the IDF soldier. When this



chapter is finished, it will become clear that, through their studies, *haredi* yeshiva students sincerely believe that they *are* actively engaged in the defense of the State of Israel.

### *Scriptural Foundations*

Although the Jewish people trace their origins to a period of over three thousand years ago, their long history produced a relative paucity of literature relating to wars and soldiering. Before the establishment of the State of Israel, few Jewish guidelines for war and peace existed outside of the Tanakh.<sup>127</sup> Despite the abundance of wars throughout the Tanakh, there does appear to be a certain condemnation attached to bloodshed on the one hand and a call for pacifism on the other. For instance, in Deuteronomy 20:10-12, God commands Moses to search for peaceful options before he goes to war with enemy nations.

When you march up to attack a city, make its people an offer of peace. If they accept and open their gates, all the people in it shall be subject to forced labor and shall work for you. If they refuse to make peace and they engage you in battle, lay siege to that city.<sup>128</sup>

While it is not surprising to find references to slavery and slaughter in the Tanakh, this mention of peacemaking does stand out. It demonstrates that there is, in fact, an ancient Jewish standard for seeking peaceful resolutions to conflicts as great as war. Alongside this call to the Israelites to seek peace before going to war, God rebukes one of Judaism's most revered figures for the carnage that he has caused. When King David is preparing to

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<sup>127</sup> Stadler, "Other-Worldly Soldiers," 23.

<sup>128</sup> Dt. 20:10-12 NIV

build the First Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, God tells him that his history of violence has made him unworthy to construct this most holy site. As told in I Chronicles 22:8, God admonishes David, “You have shed much blood and have fought many wars. You are not to build a house for my Name, because you have shed much blood on the earth in my sight.”<sup>129</sup> Perhaps there is not a more powerful motivation for a religious Jew to detest violence than this example. King David, who had conquered Jerusalem for the specific purpose of erecting an altar to worship God, was reproached by God for his excessive use of violence. For the *haredi* yeshiva student who actively seeks favor in the eyes of God, King David’s penalty is a compelling justification for avoiding military service.

### *The Tribe of Levi*

The most fascinating aspect of the Tanakh’s guidelines for war and soldiering is its description of the tribe of Levi. When Moses was leading the Israelites through the Sinai Desert, God commanded him to take a census of the entire Israelite community and assign every man who was at least twenty years old to a division in the army. At the same time, God instructed Moses that members of the tribe of Levi were to be excused from army service so that they could serve in a religious capacity. Numbers 1:47-53 recounts God’s command:

The families of the tribe of Levi, however, were not counted along with the others. The Lord had said to Moses: ‘You must not count the tribe of Levi or include them in the census of the other Israelites. Instead, appoint the Levites to be in charge of the tabernacle of the Testimony – over all its furnishings and everything belonging to it...The Israelites are to set up their tents by divisions, each man in his own camp under his own standard. The Levites, however, are to set up their tents around the

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<sup>129</sup> I Chr. 22:8.

tabernacle of the Testimony so that the wrath will not fall on the Israelite community. The Levites are to be responsible for the care of the tabernacle of the Testimony.<sup>130</sup>

From this passage, it appears that the Tanakh places a spiritual and temporal duty on the tribe of Levi. In addition to its role as keepers of the Tabernacle, the Levites are charged with ensuring that ‘wrath’ does not touch the Israelites. Whether this ‘wrath’ comes from God or from enemy nations, it most certainly refers to physical harm.

For centuries, members of the tribe of Levi remained protected from military service. Even after the destruction of the Second Temple and the ensuing exile, descendents of this tribe played an important religious role in Jewish communities around the world. In today’s Israel, not every member of the *haredi* communities has a Levite ancestor. Nevertheless, they utilize this ancient model to defend their decision to eschew military service. Their rationale is found primarily in the works of the twelfth-century Jewish philosopher Maimonides, who examined this precedent and ruled that military exemptions should be expanded. He wrote:

[The tribe of Levi was] separated for one task – to serve [in the Temple] and to teach His righteous ways...therefore they were separated from the ways of the world, and they do not wage war as do the other Israelites...Not only the tribe of Levi, but any individual whose spirit moves him to...separate himself to stand before G-d [*sic*] and to serve him [*sic*], to know Him...and he removes from his neck the yoke of considerations which most people see, behold this person becomes most holy.<sup>131</sup>

With this edict, droves of *haredim* validate their non-service. Service to God sublimates service to the state. Their role as protectors of the faith is much more critical to the

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<sup>130</sup> Nm. 1:47-53.

<sup>131</sup> Cohen, “On Yeshiva Men,” 4.

security of the nation than all of the soldiers and weaponry of the military. Consequently, the *haredi* yeshiva student safeguards the Jewish people from the ‘wrath’ emanating from earthly and heavenly bodies.

The *haredim* sincerely believe that the study of the Torah and other divinely inspired texts has allowed the Jewish people to survive generations of exile and finally return to the land of their ancestors.<sup>132</sup> From merciless persecution at the hands of their resident nations to the ultimate horror of the Holocaust, the only thing that has sustained the Jewish people throughout their collective tragedies was the work of a select number of Jews who remained unwaveringly committed to analyzing God’s Word. Drawing inspiration from this history, the *haredim* often refer to the yeshiva students in their community by commenting, “On his Torah is dependent the whole world.”<sup>133</sup> While the *haredi* conception of the ‘whole world’ most likely excludes Gentiles, the aforementioned comment suggests that the fate of the Jewish world is inextricably tied to the extent to which the Jewish people devote their lives to unraveling the mysteries of God’s Word. Indeed, the study of the Torah, according to the *haredim*, is “...the only real guarantee to the protection and well-being of the Jewish people.”<sup>134</sup>

### *The Role of Torah Study in Israel’s National Security*

The protective power of Torah study is not limited only to the preservation of Jewish life. Despite their complex view of war and violence, the *haredim* also believe

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<sup>132</sup> Stadler, “Other-Worldly Soldiers,” 38.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>134</sup> Hakak, “From the Army of G-d,” 30.

that the activities of the Torah scholar play an instrumental role on the battlefield in modern-day Israel.<sup>135</sup> Through his studies, the Torah scholar provides heavenly blessings that supplement the IDF. According to this logic, the IDF would never find victory in the field of battle without the work of yeshiva students. The *haredim* point to Psalms 127: 1 for verification of this view. It reads, “Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain.”<sup>136</sup> The *haredim* believe that any action without God’s backing is meaningless and doomed to fail. For all of the effort that the IDF puts into defending the Jewish state, its endeavors are for naught unless its actions are undertaken with the belief that God is the ultimate reason that Israel will be able to vanquish its enemies. Torah study, then, becomes the means by which the Jewish people receive God’s help during times of tribulation. It is the “secret weapon of the people of Israel” that allows them achieve miraculous victories in war.<sup>137</sup> The *haredim* point to the outcomes of the Six Day War and the Yom Kippur War as evidence, when against all odds, the IDF emerged victorious.<sup>138</sup> Their work in the yeshivot contributed to Israel’s unprecedented successes on the battlefield during these conflicts. In sum, as Rabbi Shach once declared, “Other than the Torah we have no security; without it, neither soldiers nor the IDF will save us.”<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Mazie, *Israel’s Higher Law*, 198.

<sup>136</sup> Ps. 127:1.

<sup>137</sup> Stadler, “Other-Worldly Soldiers,” 27.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Cohen, *Israel and Its Army*, 130-131.

Furthermore, the *haredim* believe that the losses Israel suffers on the battlefield are directly correlated to the societal currents in Israeli society. More accurately, the *haredim* contend that God punishes Israel for its lack of faith. For example, the First Gulf War marked the first time that Israelis felt vulnerable within the boundaries of Israel proper. Not counting the First Intifada or the shelling of Northern Israel during the 1980s, the First Gulf War ushered in a new era in which Israeli citizens no longer felt safe within the confines of the large cities along Israel's coast. Never before had Israelis felt the devastating effects of war at home until Saddam Hussein's Scud missiles began to rain down on Tel Aviv and Haifa. The *haredim* explained this phenomenon as a consequence of Israel's rapid shift toward secularization. The First Gulf War was "a divine rebuke to the secular arrogance of contemporary Israel...God was reminding Israel that its rightful role is not in waging war but in faith in the eternal protective power of God."<sup>140</sup> Backing up this claim is the fact that the early 1990s witnessed a Labor-led government that appeared to be committed to reversing religious trends in the public square. According to Asher Arian and Michal Shamir, a pre-election survey in 1992 demonstrated that 29 percent of Israelis "support[ed] public life according to Jewish religious law," as opposed to 43-51 percent in earlier years.<sup>141</sup> In essence, the *haredim* believe that Israel found itself under siege precisely because it was moving away from God. As a result, God allowed Israel's enemies to wreak havoc on the Jewish people. No amount of soldiers or weapons could reverse this development. The only solution lay in returning to the folds of

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<sup>140</sup> Stadler, "Playing with Sacred/Corporeal Identities," 162.

<sup>141</sup> Asher Arian and Michal Shamir, "Context and Comparison in Electoral Research: The Israel National Election Study," in *Election Studies: What's Their Use?*, ed. Elihu Katz with Yael Warshel (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001), 140.

traditional religious life. As the *haredi* Rabbi Menachem Zeev Maor once instructed, Israel had to find a way “...to mend the reason the enemies were sent by God.”<sup>142</sup> The *haredim*, for their part, embrace this task.

In his acceptance of this mission, the *haredi* yeshiva student goes to war. He becomes a soldier in a different type of war – a war in which his pursuit of righteousness allows the Jewish people to enjoy the safety behind God’s shield. His involvement in this war is as important, if not more so, than the valorous sacrifice of the individual IDF soldier in the field. The war of the yeshiva student takes place in the spiritual realm, a venue where fighter jets and artillery have no utility.

Whereas the [combat] soldier is involved with physical battles on various fronts, the Haredi [*sic*] ‘warrior’ is engaged in a difficult vocation and an arduous and never-ending war against physical desires...[H]e is engaged in a far more extensive war, shouldering the weight of prohibitions and taboos, fighting the evil inclination while adhering to the Torah.<sup>143</sup>

In this capacity, the *haredi* yeshiva student becomes an ‘other-worldly’ soldier. He submits himself to service in a battle that has been fought since time immemorial, the metaphysical struggle between good and evil. He fights on behalf of the entire Jewish people, making certain that they do not unwittingly relinquish their spiritual anointing as God’s Chosen People.<sup>144</sup>

Due to their involvement in this spiritual conflict, the *haredim* justify non-enlistment in the IDF by claiming that they split the burden of defense with their military counterparts. *Haredi* authorities employ military concepts to explain their reasoning. Like

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<sup>142</sup> Stadler, “Playing with Sacred/Corporeal Identities,” 162.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 163-165.

<sup>144</sup> Stadler, “Other-Worldly Soldiers,” 25.

any other unit of the military, they claim, yeshiva students must hone their craft without any deviation. In order for them to become experts in the field of Torah study, they must completely immerse themselves in their work and perfect their responsibilities through training and repetition. Rabbi Neugerschall writes,

I am for integration, but don't we need the sea commandos? The artillery? The armoured corps?...But can you be a pilot for one week and then you are off for another week? A week as a sea commando? Everyone understands that in this manner you will not have anything. The structure of the army is such that each unit has its own flag and soldiers...and the Torah is our weapon.<sup>145</sup>

From this point of view, yeshiva students constitute their own division. If they are disturbed, for any reason, their value as spiritual 'warriors' suffers. Some *haredi* authorities even believe that yeshiva students add such an important component to defense that the IDF should attach soldiers to yeshivot to protect the students from all outside interference. "If the government knew how much [Torah] students protect the state's well-being through their study, it would put guards in the schools, making sure that learning is never interrupted."<sup>146</sup> This statement reflects the *haredi* view that the Israeli government fails to appreciate exactly how much yeshiva students contribute to the protection of the State of Israel. Like the IDF, yeshiva students are an integral component in matters of national security. An analogy from a member of the Chief Rabbinate adequately sums up this belief: "It's like any machine, even if you are missing one screw it can't continue. One little screw can't get up and say, 'I am the most

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<sup>145</sup> Stadler, "Other-Worldly Soldiers," 27.

<sup>146</sup> Cohen, *Israel and Its Army*, 130-131-132.



important' because you need all of the parts of the machine...everyone has his role."<sup>147</sup> It follows, then, that if *haredi* yeshiva students are conscripted, Israel's entire defense 'machine' will fail to function.

### *Conclusion*

This chapter has provided the religious and spiritual reasoning behind the *haredi* communities' avoidance of military service. After much analysis, there is not enough evidence to conclude that Jewish religious law forbids military service. Nor is there sufficient evidence to safely determine that the Jewish religion is inherently pacifistic in nature. While there are scriptural examples depicting a traditional Jewish recourse to peace as well as a powerful contempt for excessive bloodshed, it is difficult to defend a conclusion that argues for a total Jewish rejection of violence. After all, the ancient Israelite people established their kingdom primarily at the tip of a sword. It is, however, safe to conclude that, from the perspective of the *haredim*, military service does present a problem for the yeshiva student's quest for a spiritually pure and peaceful existence. As modern-day representatives of the tribe of Levi, *haredi* yeshiva students have one role: to serve God. Interruption of this duty, especially for the purpose of going to war, is strictly forbidden. At the same time, yeshiva students frequently refer to their studies and life-style as a war. They are constantly at war to fend off spiritually malignant desires and temptations, and only their Torah studies successfully overcome these enemies. In so doing, they believe that they add an essential element to the defense of the Jewish people. Through their quest for righteousness and purity, *haredi* yeshiva students protect the

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<sup>147</sup> Stadler, "Other-Worldly Soldiers," 27.

State of Israel and augment the IDF's tactics in battle. Ultimately, this reasoning provides *haredi* yeshiva students both an excuse to avoid conscription *and* a case for inclusion into Israel's body politic. *Haredi* yeshiva students do perform service to the State of Israel, a service beyond the confines of earthly understanding.

## Chapter Six

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## Conclusions

At the beginning of this paper, three hypotheses were offered with the intent to discover why *haredi* yeshiva students do not serve in the IDF. First, *haredi* yeshiva students do not serve in the IDF because they do not want to. After much research, there is compelling evidence to accept this argument. Because the majority of *haredim* are anti-Zionist, they reject most Israeli institutions. In so doing, they believe that they remove themselves from the obligations incumbent upon Israeli citizens. *Haredi* yeshiva students also fear the repercussions of interrupting their studies to report for military service. If they choose to enlist, their efficacy as a scholar will be affected, secularizing forces will jade their worldview, and they will encounter resentment among their *haredi* brethren upon returning to the folds of traditional *haredi* life. As a result, young *haredi* males fear the societal repercussions attached to military service, so they choose not to enlist.

The second hypothesis suggested that *haredi* yeshiva students are political pacifists. It was learned that the tenets of pacifism have resonated in *haredi* communities long before the establishment of the State of Israel. It was also discovered that the *haredi* communities possess cultural taboos against violence. Even with these minor incidents of communal violence in past decades, the *haredim* exhibit an aversion to any action that results in major physical injury and/or death. Despite this tradition of pacifism, however, *haredi* public opinion is significantly hawkish and indisposed to the politics of peace. Not

only do they favor military solutions to conflict, but they also oppose non-violent remedies such as treaties and political settlements. Given such evidence, the hypothesis that the *haredim* avoid military service because they are intrinsically pacifistic must be refuted.

The final hypothesis surmised that *haredi* yeshiva students do not serve in the IDF because Jewish religious law forbids military service. There is no evidence in the research findings to support this hypothesis. Although the Tanakh instructs that members of the tribe of Levi are to be exempted from military service, it is inconceivable that every member of Israel's *haredi* communities is a descendent of the Levites. Furthermore, *haredi* yeshiva students believe that, through their studies, they are engaged in a spiritual war, a role that complements actual IDF soldiers. *Haredi* scholars justify their non-enlistment by claiming that their work in the yeshivot has directly contributed to Israel's major war victories. While the *haredim* may truly believe that their studies add an integral element to Israel's national defense, there is no way to corroborate this claim. As such, this hypothesis must be rejected. *Haredi* yeshiva students can wage this spiritual battle just as effectively while serving in the IDF. In modern-day Israel, physical security ultimately outweighs spiritual security.

When this research question and its accompanying hypotheses were first unveiled, each argument was couched in terms informed by the principles of conflict resolution. However, after sifting through the research, there is no evidence to suggest that *haredi* yeshiva students avoid military service for any reason related to conflict resolution. Although it was concluded that the *haredim* simply do not want to serve in the IDF, they are motivated less by an aversion to violent conflict than by a fear of negative social

repercussions associated with military service and an antipathy for Zionist institutions and social constructs. Moreover, the evidence convincingly dispels the hypothesis that *haredi* yeshiva students justify non-service on the basis of pacifistic political beliefs. Far from projecting political opinions resembling anything close to support for peaceful conflict resolution methods, the *haredim* exhibit overwhelmingly hawkish and aggressive political attitudes. Finally, there is no concrete evidence to support the hypothesis that the *haredim* rely upon a Jewish religious tradition of conflict resolution to account for their non-service. The *haredi* yeshiva students reason that, instead of inducing them to search for peaceful solutions to conflict, their close adherence to Jewish religious tradition obliges them to pray for the success of the IDF on the battlefield by asking God to destroy Israel's enemies. In sum, the results of the research clearly indicate that the *haredim* demonstrate little to no commitment to a peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Unfortunately, any hope that the *haredim* may serve as a peaceful model for other Jewish Israelis to emulate remains but a mere fantasy.

### *The Future of Haredi Exemptions*

In all likelihood, this policy will not be reversed any time soon. This is due to the fact that ultra-Orthodox *haredi* parties are firmly entrenched in the Knesset, and statistics indicate that their hold on political power will only strengthen in the coming years. A Central Bureau of Statistics survey, released in 2008, shows that in 2006, 7.5 percent of respondents, aged 20 and older, self-identified themselves as ultra-Orthodox.<sup>148</sup> During

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<sup>148</sup> Central Bureau of Statistics, "Statistical Abstract of Israel 2008, Table 7.4: Persons Aged 20 and Over, by Religiosity and by Selected Characteristics"; available from [http://www.cbs.gov.il/reader/shnaton/shnatone\\_new.htm?CYear=2008&Vol=59&CSubject=7](http://www.cbs.gov.il/reader/shnaton/shnatone_new.htm?CYear=2008&Vol=59&CSubject=7); Internet; accessed 10 June 2009.

the same period, ultra-Orthodox political parties made up 15 percent (12 Shas MKs and 6 United Torah Judaism MKs) of the Seventeenth Knesset, in session from 17 April 2006 to 24 February 2009.<sup>149</sup> Although this overrepresentation is staggering, demographic trends in the *haredi* communities are expected to push this disparity to further extremes. *Haredi* elementary school students comprise 25 percent of all Israeli elementary school pupils, and *haredi* secondary school students make up 20 percent.<sup>150</sup> When these children reach voting-age, the *haredi* communities, "...will have an incontrovertible demographic advantage vis-à-vis the overwhelming majority of the Jewish electorate in Israel."<sup>151</sup> With this political power, it is difficult to envision any change in the current policy of *haredi* IDF exemptions. Barring an unexpected shift in *haredi* attitudes toward military service, the policy will continue as is, and future generations of *haredi* yeshiva students will represent a vast proportion of draft-age Jewish Israeli males unaffected by IDF conscription procedures.

Two strands of thought exist regarding this development. On one hand, some voices within the IDF argue that *haredi* recruits are not needed in the military. These voices stress that the IDF is already inundated with recruits, and it is finding it increasingly difficult to incorporate these draftees. At present, annual draft pools are flooded with 'baby-boomers,' born in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War and currently reaching conscription age, as well as the influx of thousands of draft-age

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<sup>149</sup> Knesset, "Factional and Government Make-Up of the Seventeenth Knesset;" available from [http://www.knesset.gov.il/history/eng/eng\\_hist17\\_s.htm](http://www.knesset.gov.il/history/eng/eng_hist17_s.htm); and "Seventeenth Knesset;" available from <http://www.knesset.gov.il/review/ReviewPage3.aspx?kns=17&lng=3>; Internet; accessed 5 May 2009.

<sup>150</sup> Asher Cohen, "The Religious Parties in the 2006 Election," *Israel Affairs* 13, no. 2 (April 2007): 331.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 330.

immigrants from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia.<sup>152</sup> Moreover, there are signals from the IDF that it is considering terminating the policy of universal conscription altogether.<sup>153</sup> On the other hand, high-ranking IDF officials vehemently deny the notion that the IDF does not need *haredi* recruits. Former IDF Chief of Staff Lt.-Gen. Dan Halutz argued that, “This phenomenon will not be able to continue for much longer for the simple reason that we will cross a line that without this critical number of recruits the defense establishment will not be able to fulfill its missions.”<sup>154</sup> These officials complain that, due to the lack of draft-age recruits, reserve soldiers are bearing too much of the burden. The former head of the IDF Manpower Directorate, Maj.-Gen. Elazar Stern, wants to ease the burden of these reserve soldiers, since they are being called upon too frequently to report for combat duty. Stern would like to see reservists report only for training, as elongated combat duty interrupts their family and professional lives. In order to do this, Stern says, the IDF needs more draft-age recruits to perform compulsory service.<sup>155</sup>

At the present time, both of these arguments are valid, and it is impossible to accept either position given the evidence. What is certain, however, is that the controversy over *haredi* yeshiva student exemptions will remain volatile for the foreseeable future. Only a policy shift, either a move toward legitimate universal conscription or an end to it altogether, will assuage the tempestuous emotions engendered by this issue.

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<sup>152</sup> Aronoff, “Wars as Catalysts,” 47.

<sup>153</sup> Waxman, “Religion in the Israeli Public Square,” 235.

<sup>154</sup> Izenberg, “Halutz Opposes.”

<sup>155</sup> Shtrasler, “IDF Proposes Replacement” and Greenberg, “We Won’t Be.”

If there is no change, the potential social repercussions of this policy are troubling, as the emotions surrounding it only serve to exacerbate an already tense relationship between the *haredim* and other segments of Jewish Israeli society. There exists a deep chasm between the political opinions of the *haredim* and the rest of the Jewish Israeli population, a split that poses an imminent threat to the stability of Israeli society. Not only do the *haredim* resist Israeli attempts to broker peace deals, but they also strive to impose their own version of Judaism on the rest of the population, an action that unambiguously aggravates non-*haredi* Jewish Israelis.

...Non-religious Jews are confronted with a sector that is interested in more than maintaining its own well-being, and seeks to imprint its inclinations on the social order as a whole. The ultra-Orthodox are by no means ready to dismiss their self-image as holders of the “only” authentic Judaism, which, they firmly believe, should be abided by all Jews. As such, they definitely represent a conflictual factor of *anti-status quo*, aiming at the limitation of the non-religious’ freedom of action.<sup>156</sup>

This combination of anti-peace political opinions and the burdensome attempt to enforce strict religious societal norms has set the *haredi* communities on a collision course with the majority of Jewish Israelis. As illustrated by an additional survey provided by Eliezer Ben-Rafael, the tension between these segments of society is authentic, and the potential for intra-Jewish conflict is all too real. Of the ultra-Orthodox respondents who were asked, “to what extent do you perceive tension between yourself and non-religious Israeli Jews?,” 69 percent answered that they perceived tensions, 47 percent of whom perceived sharp tensions (see Table 7). While these numbers are harrowing, the responses of the non-religious *vis-à-vis* the ultra-Orthodox present an even more ominous picture.

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<sup>156</sup> Ben-Rafael, “The Faces of Religiosity,” 95.



<b>Table 7: Perceptions of Tensions between Religiosity Categories.</b> <i>To what extent do you perceive tension between the following categories? (%)</i>				
Members of Categories <i>vis-à-vis</i> others	Sharp Tensions	Some Tensions	No Tension	Number
Non-religious <i>vis-à-vis</i> ultra-Orthodox	69	19	12	411
Ultra-Orthodox <i>vis-à-vis</i> non-religious	47	22	31	48
Source: Eliezer Ben-Rafael, "The Faces of Religiosity in Israel: Cleavages or Continuum?," <i>Israel Studies</i> 13, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 113.				

Almost 90 percent of the non-religious respondents perceived tension, and 69 percent perceived sharp tensions.<sup>157</sup> If these tensions remain unchecked, Israeli society could very well be torn asunder, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict could persist interminably. How, then, can Jewish Israelis assuage these political and religious tensions so that Israel as a whole can approach the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a united and confident front?

### *A Practical Solution*

Before closing, the proposition of a practical and relatively innocuous solution to this controversial issue is in order. This thesis has explained that neither the *Nahal Haredi* battalion nor the Tal Law has met the expectations with which they were initiated. Still, a model exists that may prove more successful in integrating increasing numbers of *haredi* young men into the IDF. The *Hesder Yeshivot* is the inspiration for this model.

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<sup>157</sup> Ben-Rafael, "The Faces of Religiosity," 113.

*Hesder Yeshivot* ('arrangement academies') combine Torah study with military service. Beginning in 1965, then Prime Minister Levi Eshkol approved this project in an attempt to attract non-*haredi* religious men to service in the IDF. Much like the *haredim*, the rabbis of these young men feared the secularizing effects of the military and spoke out against military service.<sup>158</sup> Nevertheless, Eshkol was able to strike a deal with these non-*haredi* rabbis in which the students who chose to serve in this arrangement would not be entirely removed from their religious life-style and studies. Students who choose this option agree to a five-year term of service.<sup>159</sup> Upon enlistment at age 18, *hesder* students undergo a six-month period of basic training, after which they are allowed to leave the army and resume Torah studies at their yeshiva. For the next four-and-a-half years, *hesder* students are periodically called up, much like reserve soldiers, for active duty that does not exceed a total of sixteen months. During all periods of active duty, *hesder* students serve in completely homogeneous units, thus mitigating the dangerous influence of secular soldiers.<sup>160</sup>

Since the first experiment in 1965, *Hesder Yeshivot* have proven to be a rousing success. Currently, forty *Hesder Yeshivot* provide 1,200 annual recruits, totaling about 6,000 *hesder* soldiers altogether.<sup>161</sup> The vast majority of Torah scholars who choose to

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<sup>158</sup> Yagil Levy, *Israel's Materialist Militarism* (New York: Lexington Books, 2007), 85-86.

<sup>159</sup> Stuart A. Cohen, "Re-Discovery of Orthodox Jewish Law Relating to the Military and War (*Hilkhot Tzavah U-Milchamah*) in Contemporary Israel: Trends and Implications," *Israel Studies* 12, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 22.

<sup>160</sup> Hofnung, "Ethnicity, Religion and Politics," 327.

<sup>161</sup> Matthew Wagner and Yaakov Katz, "Hesder Yeshivot May Be Disbanded," *Jerusalem Post*, 22 February 2006; available from <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1139395461324&page=JPArticle%2FShowFull>; Internet; accessed 5 May 2009.

serve within the *hesder* arrangement come from the National-Religious camp. Unlike the *haredim*, these religious young men embrace Zionism and fully believe in service to their country. The comments of one *hesder* student adequately demonstrate the differences in outlook between these young religious men and young *haredi* men.

We advocate [military service] because we are convinced that, given our circumstances – would that they be better – military service is a mitzvah [commandment], and a most important one at that. Without impugning the patriotism and ethical posture of those who think otherwise, we feel that for the overwhelming majority of [Torah scholars], defense is a moral imperative.<sup>162</sup>

In their zeal for the Zionist enterprise, many *hesder* units serve in some of the most intense combat situations. This eagerness to place their lives in the midst of such conflict is reflected in their total proportion of IDF fatalities during the Second Intifada. The distribution of combat deaths during this conflict reveal that the proportion of *hesder* soldiers killed is almost twice the rate of the whole Jewish Israeli male population.<sup>163</sup> As unfortunate as this statistic is, it certainly speaks to the success of the *Hesder Yeshivot*.

Because the *Hesder Yeshivot* project is associated with the National-Religious movement, *haredi* yeshiva students are most likely not suited for it. Yet, if the IDF initiated a similar project based in *haredi* traditions, the results may ease the tensions surrounding the policy of *haredi* yeshiva student exemptions. In order for this project to work, however, the new *haredi* military framework must allow *haredi* young men to enlist in the IDF at the age of 18. One of the major shortcomings of the Tal Law is that the ‘decision year’ allows *haredi* yeshiva students to postpone their decision to enlist,

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<sup>162</sup> Cohen, “On Yeshiva Men,” 10.

<sup>163</sup> Stuart A. Cohen, “Tensions Between Military Service and Jewish Orthodoxy in Israel: Implications Imagined and Real,” *Israel Studies* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 104.

work or remain in the yeshiva until the age of 22, when they are most likely to be married with children.<sup>164</sup> With large families to support and already well entrenched in the *haredi* community, these young men do not have the freedom to make the decision to leave the confines of the *haredi* world and experience life outside its walls. In spite of this, there is reason to believe that future generations of young *haredi* men may not be as anti-enlistment as their older community leaders. As Israel grows older and the ‘travesty’ of the establishment of an un-messianic Jewish state fades into memory, younger generations of *haredim* may begin to relinquish the anti-Zionist attitudes maintained by older generations. This may result in an increasing acceptance of the State of Israel as well as a rise in the number of young *haredi* males who feel an obligation to participate in the nation’s defense. An option to enlist at the age of 18 may be a major catalyst in fostering this change.

Should young *haredi* men choose this path, they would have two primary options. First, they could join a revamped version of the *Nahal Haredi* battalion if they wished to uphold their religious and communal traditions. The new version of *Nahal* would closely mirror the *Hesder Yeshivot*, comprising an initial six-month term of training followed by a four-and-a-half year combination of Torah study and active military service. *Nahal* units would remain segregated by gender, and the soldiers would be offered daily opportunities to study and pray. In addition, they would be allowed frequent opportunities to contact their community rabbis. In this scenario, military service may eventually come to represent a powerful act of worship, much like it already does for National-Religious soldiers. The second option would be to join a regular IDF battalion. As it stands now,

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<sup>164</sup> Shtrasler, “IDF Proposes Replacement.”

young *haredi* men encounter few prospects for escaping the confines of their communities. Enlistment in a battalion made up of secular and non-*haredi* religious soldiers would offer an opportunity to experience a new way of life. At 18-years-old, these young *haredim* would encounter fresh perspectives from non-*haredi* Israelis that may encourage them to break out of the walls of parochial *haredi* life in order to find their own unique path. The lasting bonds formed and the lessons learned in the IDF would equip these young *haredim* with the tools necessary to lead a life all their own, unimpeded by the restrictions and taboos that characterize *haredi* communities. Either option is promising. In the end though, the IDF cannot wait until young *haredi* men are well established in their communities. It must reach them at the impressionable and carefree age of 18.

### *Limitations*

The data used in this thesis are limited by the low numbers of *haredim* who are willing to participate in surveys. Although the public opinion statistics in this thesis include *haredi* voices, they are not fully representative of all *haredi* communities, as in each survey, the proportion of *haredi* respondents to all other respondents is considerably lower than the actual proportion of *haredim* to the rest of Jewish Israeli society. If a higher proportion of *haredim* had participated in these surveys, the results may have revealed political opinions that differed from the conclusions put forward in this thesis.

Moreover, an extensive series of in-depth interviews would have certainly added an important dimension to this thesis. Yet, interviews with *haredim* can be problematic. As noted by several researchers who have attempted to penetrate Israel's *haredi*

communities for the purpose of conducting research, members of the *haredi* communities, by and large, shy away from interviews with non-*haredi* researchers. Even if a *haredi* individual consents to an interview, his/her comments must necessarily be analyzed with caution. Due to the extent of social control that *haredi* authorities exercise over their communities, it is reasonable to suspect that *haredi* responses may represent an official position rather than an honest individual opinion. For this reason, a diversity of viewpoints may not become apparent, as may have certainly been the case in the previous chapter that analyzed the comments of *haredi* yeshiva students regarding their role in Israel's national security. There may indeed exist a *haredi* yeshiva student who disagrees with the notion that his religious studies contribute to Israel's battlefield victories, but he may be too intimidated to say so. This also extends to other popular *haredi* beliefs, including the official *haredi* position on military service. There is reason to suspect that a *haredi* young man would find it difficult to admit to a personal desire to serve in the IDF. If he did confess to such a desire and his peers found out, he may well be expelled from the *haredi* world. Notwithstanding these problems associated with *haredi* interviews, this method of research would have undoubtedly provided this thesis with an opportunity to ascertain if there is any variance among individual *haredi* attitudes toward military service.

### *Further Research*

The emphasis of any future research should be on the conclusions derived from the first hypothesis, focusing specifically on the reasons why *haredi* young men do not *want* to serve in the IDF. To start, an original study should be conducted that seeks to

gauge the attitudes of younger generations of *haredim* to Zionism. As was explained in this thesis, older generations of *haredim* possess a strong antipathy to Zionism, which has partly contributed to their refusal to serve in the military. What is unclear is to what extent this hostility has passed down to younger generations. After all, the younger generations were not alive to witness the “catastrophe” that was the establishment of the State of Israel. If younger generations of *haredim* display a more amenable attitude toward Zionism, this particular justification for non-service may not only lose much of its influence over *haredi* young men, but it may also signify the beginning of a closer *haredi* relationship to the state.

In addition, further research should be conducted to analyze the experience of *haredi* soldiers in the *Nahal* Battalion. This effort should seek to determine if these “soldier-scholars” have suffered negative social and/or spiritual repercussions as a result of their decision to serve in the IDF. Questions relating to the justifications for non-service should include: How have your friends and family members reacted to your decision to serve in the IDF? Are the prospects for finding a suitable *haredi* wife any different now that you have joined the IDF? How has military service affected your Torah studies? How has military service affected your relationship with God? Although this thesis has recounted many of the justifications that *haredi* young men point to as a reason for not serving, this further research would make it possible to gauge the extent to which these justifications are grounded in reality. By performing a study on the *haredim* who decide to enlist in the IDF, this further research could satisfactorily determine if negative social and spiritual repercussions do, in fact, befall the *haredi* young man who chooses to become an IDF soldier.

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